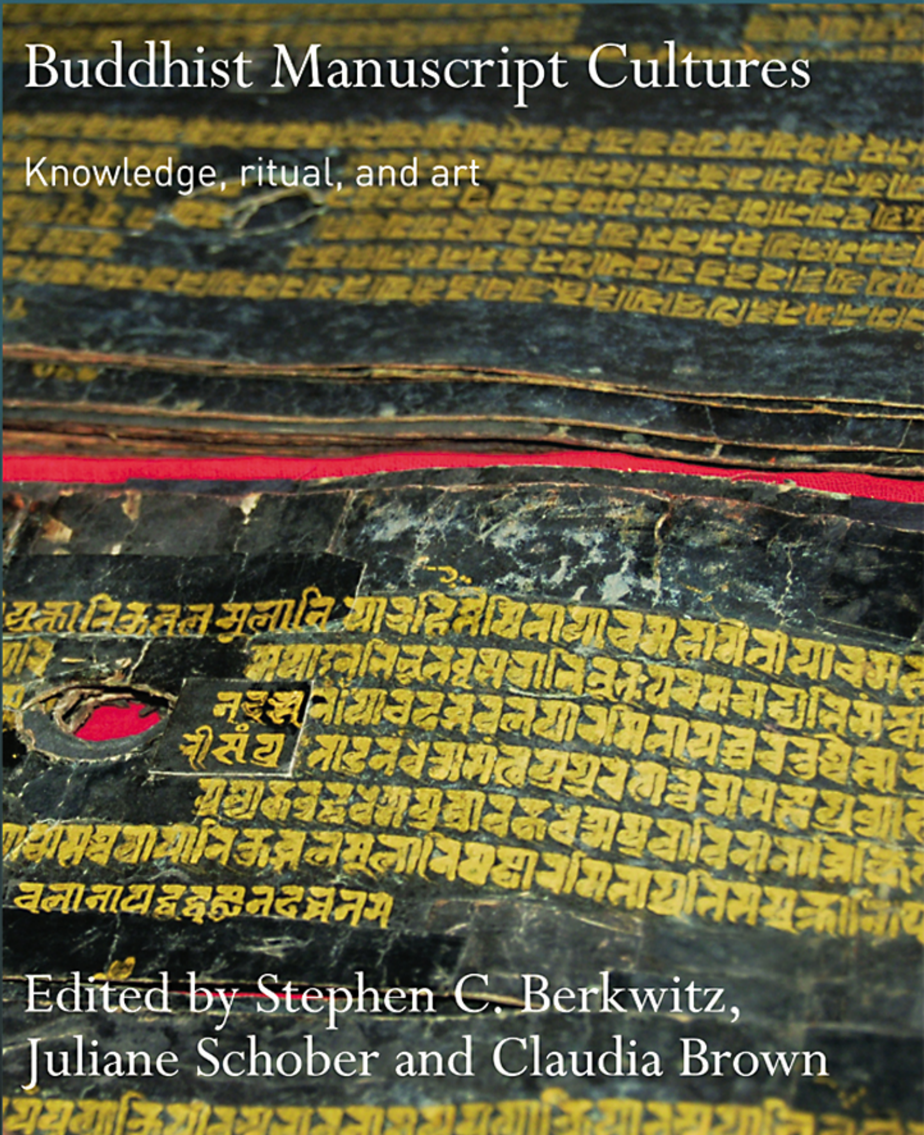
Buddhist Manuscript Cultures

Knowledge, ritual, and art



Edited by Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober and Claudia Brown

ROUTLEDGE

Buddhist Manuscript Cultures

Buddhist Manuscript Cultures explores how religious and cultural practices in pre-modern Asia were shaped by literary and artistic traditions as well as by Buddhist material culture. This study of Buddhist texts focuses on the significance of their material forms rather than their doctrinal contents and examines how and why they were made.

Collectively, the book offers cross-cultural and comparative insights into the transmission of Buddhist knowledge and the use of texts and images as ritual objects in the artistic and aesthetic traditions of Buddhist cultures. Drawing on case studies from India, Gandhara, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Mongolia, China, and Nepal, the chapters included investigate the range of interests and values associated with producing and using written texts and the roles manuscripts and images play in the transmission of Buddhist texts and in fostering devotion among Buddhist communities.

Contributions are by reputed scholars in Buddhist Studies and represent diverse disciplinary approaches from religious studies, art history, anthropology, and history. This book will be of interest to scholars and students working in these fields.

Stephen C. Berkwitz is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Missouri State University. His research focuses on Buddhist Studies in Sri Lanka. At present, he is preparing *South Asian Buddhism: A Survey*, also for publication with Routledge.

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1 Introduction

Rethinking Buddhist manuscript cultures

Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober, and Claudia Brown

The great reverence among Buddhists everywhere for the Buddha and his oral teaching called the Dharma gave rise to equally great efforts to record, transmit, and preserve the Buddha's Word (*buddhavacana*) in written form. It is widely recognized that people from within the Buddhist tradition, which is really a large family of traditions that once spanned nearly the entire Asian continent, first began to write Buddhist texts beginning around the first century BCE. As time went on, Buddhist writers composed, copied, and translated huge numbers of texts, many of which were believed to have originated with the direct teaching of the Buddha named Gotama or Śākyamuni. As the monastic community split into different sects following the Buddha's death sometime around the fourth century BCE, some of these sects developed their own canons or collections of scriptures. Some of these canons survive intact; others have an existence that is only attested to in other sources and fragments of extant texts. Regardless, there was an early proliferation of canonical literature that eventually came under the designation of Tripiṭaka, or "Three Baskets," which comprises the collection of *vinaya* texts connected with monastic disciplinary codes, *sūtra* texts that convey doctrinal teachings in narrative form, and *abhidharma* texts concerning abstract philosophical speculation about the nature of psychophysical existence.

History suggests that certain texts from an especially early period were found in similar forms among canons of different sects such as the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda in ancient India. Other texts were developed later, after sectarian divisions began to form, and thus they vary more widely in name and content. Based on textual and archaeological information, scholars infer that the writing of Buddhist texts began around the beginning of the Common Era in the two disparate locations of Aluvihāra, Sri Lanka, and the Gandhāran region in what is now Western Pakistan and Eastern Afghanistan. The fact that these two places are about two thousand miles apart and were the seats of distinctively different Buddhist traditions suggests that these events occurred independently of one another. It also suggests that within a few centuries of the Buddha's death, his monastic followers began to feel the need to put the Dharma, which heretofore had been orally transmitted, into written form. There is every indication that the transference of an oral teaching into discrete textual forms was a lengthy and fairly unsystematic process.

The formation of Buddhist canons could take centuries, and even then, additions could still be made later in some cases. The Indian tradition holds that after the Buddha's death, a series of councils were held wherein senior monks recited what they had memorized from the Buddha. This orally standardized set of teachings, in turn, was dictated to scribes who then wrote down the Word of the Buddha. Different Mainstream Buddhist sects, however, acknowledge different councils, which enable them to conceive of their respective canons differently.[1]

In the case of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the picture is complicated further by the fact that this tradition, variously dated from between around the first century BCE to around the third century CE, appears to have developed through the composition of written texts.[2] In contrast to the so-called Mainstream Buddhist schools of the Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda, Dharmaguptaka, and other early sects that first relied on oral transmissions of Buddhist scripture, Mahāyāna communities began to form in conjunction with specific written texts. Texts like the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras (*prajñāparamitā*), which displayed interests in *bodhisattva*s, emptiness, and other concepts associated with the Mahāyāna show no obvious evidence as to having been orally transmitted. Instead, they seem to be the products of a prolific literary movement that generated vast numbers of lengthy and complex texts, many of which have been lost to history (Conze 1967: 199–200). Numerous texts transmitted through or produced in the Gandhāran region of the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent were carried into western China along the Silk Route, and this influx of various texts from different Buddhist sects spurred a massive, centuries-long translation effort to produce Chinese language versions of both Mainstream and Mahāyāna Buddhist texts.

The early impulse to spread the Dharma to new peoples and lands probably accelerated the transition from the oral to the written word in Buddhism. Monks carrying texts, relics, and other sacred objects crisscrossed Asia, exposing communities to new religious ideas and practices while necessitating the production of more texts in the forms of translations, compendiums, glossaries, and so forth. Ancient Buddhist texts thus possessed at least two distinct dimensions. They functioned as sources of religious knowledge and as objects of veneration. Wherever Buddhism spread, written works served to transmit and reinforce the religion's doctrines, rituals, and institutions in new locations. Innovation and transformation in both Buddhist texts and practices were, of course, always possible and not uncommon. At the same time, however, written works typically lent some cohesiveness to the practice and understanding of Buddhism during the centuries of its expansion into new lands and communities across the continent.

The importance of written texts to the Buddhist tradition can hardly be exaggerated. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the oral transmission of Buddhist texts continued on for many centuries even after monks began putting *sūtra*s into writing. The tradition of learning canonical texts by heart and transmitting them orally to one's monastic pupils had served the tradition well, and Buddhist monastics refused to abandon this practice entirely. We can glean the coexistence of orality and writing of Buddhist teachings in the work of the fourth century CE scholar monk Vasubandhu, who referenced these oral

transmission lineages in one of his written works (Cabezón 2004: 755). And, in the case of the northern Thai kingdom of Lan Na, the use of writing for transmitting and encountering Buddhist texts was inconsistent and less revered than efforts to memorize and orally transmit texts of religious knowledge at least up to the fifteenth century, well after the period when the technologies of writing and producing texts had become available (Veidlinger 2006: 61–2). Clearly, the importance given to the Word of the Buddha, a special class of discourse traditionally seen to hold the key to attaining wisdom and liberation, spurred the creation of written texts but did not devalue oral traditions of textual transmission either. Memorizing, reciting, and the ritual veneration of texts constituted practices that were as respected and beneficial as writing, copying, and reading them.

The enduring importance of oral textual practices notwithstanding, this volume seeks to focus attention on Buddhist manuscripts as a written form that gave rise to vast numbers of texts and cultural forms in Buddhist communities across Asia. As the name of the volume, *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures*, signifies, a diversity of textual forms and titles existed throughout premodern Asia, and these manuscripts as material culture and as ritual icons often lay at the center of elaborate socioreligious systems that developed around their production and use. Historian John Dagenais, in his study of a fourteenth-century Spanish text, describes the notion of "manuscript culture" as the world around which written manuscripts refer to and impact, a world that is constituted by the processes of reading and copying written works that are each unique as the product of a particular writer and as encountered by a particular reader (Dagenais 1994: 14–20). However different, two given manuscripts might be in terms of their materials, content, and modes of production, as long as they were written out by human hands they will share some of the same qualities of physicality, fragility, variability, and inexactitude that all such works tend to possess.

The subsequent chapters comprise revised studies first presented at a conference on "Buddhist Objects: Knowledge, Ritual and Art" held at Arizona State University in October 2006. Coinciding with the recent gift to the university of a large number of Sinhala Buddhist palm leaf manuscripts from the privately owned Guardian of the Flame Collection, a consultation with scholars of Buddhist manuscripts and art was arranged to explore in a cross-cultural manner, how manuscripts functioned in premodern Buddhist communities. It became evident to all the participants that the production and use of manuscript texts in diverse Buddhist communities and historical periods revealed a number of shared interests and attitudes among the people who wrote and read Buddhist manuscripts as well as those who created artistic images based on their forms and contents. Comparative research into the production and use of manuscripts across Buddhist cultures, as well as the various cultural forms that are linked with such works, struck everyone as a worthwhile pursuit for the field of Buddhist Studies—a field in which the conspicuous attention given to texts has only rarely extended over into a consideration of how the manuscript medium affected the ways Buddhists practiced and conceived of their tradition.

Reconstructing Buddhist manuscript cultures

The term "Buddhist manuscripts" actually encompasses a great variety of textual forms. As expected, Buddhists in premodern communities throughout Asia made use of the materials and technologies at hand to produce handwritten texts of *buddhavacana* and other treatises and narratives on the Dharma. Throughout the Indian subcontinent and in Southeast Asia, Buddhists usually wrote on palm leaves that had been dried and cut into uniform strips. These were typically inscribed with a metal stylus and subsequently blackened with ink to make the letters readable. When finished, the leaves were stacked and strung together through one or two holes punched through them and finally stored between two wooden boards cut in the shape of the long and narrow leaves. Further north, in the greater Gandhāran region and in other locales where palm leaves could not be easily obtained, Buddhist writers often used birch bark as their textual medium of choice. The bark was cut into long strips and either rolled into scrolls or cut into sheets and stored flat between boards. The scrolls found in the Gandhāran region were typically written on both sides in a vertical fashion parallel to its narrow dimension, and their colophons that identified the contents of each scroll would normally be visible when rolled up (Salomon 1999: 87).

Other media used for writing Buddhist texts include paper, cloth, silk, vellum, and occasionally plates made from metals such as copper, silver, and gold. Some of these media permitted newer manuscript formats such as notebooks that were sewn together at one end or works that were folded together like an accordion to allow readers to locate a particular section of the work with ease. As Vesna Wallace points out in her chapter in this volume, Buddhist communities could make use of more than one medium and format in the production of their manuscripts. And, as handwritten texts were carried from one culture to another, their recipients copied not only their contents but sometimes their physical forms as well. As a result, the languages and scripts used in writing typically differ much more than the actual format and appearance of the manuscripts themselves.

Nevertheless, after the invention of printing books from woodblocks in China around the seventh century, Buddhist *sūtra*s could be produced in a more stable and consistent fashion. Woodblock printing would subsequently become the preferred method of textual production not only in China but in Korea, Japan, and Tibet as well. Over time in these lands, once a canon of standard texts had been established and carved, handwritten manuscripts would ultimately become the exception next to printed woodblock editions (Lancaster 1979: 226–7). And yet, as art historical studies have shown, the hand copying and illustration of sutras remained an important opportunity to preserve Buddhist teachings, improve oneself, and gain merit. Best known are the Japanese Heian period examples, often with lavish materials and elaborate illustrations, which were donated to temples. In these gifts, and in the burials of sutras in mounds during the same period, we sense the concern for preserving Buddhist teachings during a time feared to be one of decline.[3] In East Asia, printed texts came to be considered authoritative, but devout Buddhists, notably including the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736–95),

copied sutras on a regular basis.[4] In other parts of Asia, handwritten manuscripts were the predominant forms of Buddhist texts up to the modern period when printing presses began to be widely used.

In addition to their handwritten linguistic contents, Buddhist manuscripts could have visual aspects as well. Since, in Buddhist contexts, the Dharma is taken to be delightful and supremely important as the means to attain worldly felicities and transcendent liberation, many people who produced physical texts endeavored to decorate them accordingly. Some Buddhist manuscripts contain illuminations and other line drawings on their folios. Artistic embellishments can also be found on the boards used to bind and protect the leaves of Buddhist manuscripts, and Bilinda Devage Nandadeva's contribution in this volume examines painted floral designs of that nature. More generally, Buddhist manuscript cultures in premodern Asia viewed physical manuscripts as part of a continuum of sacred objects that included the art and architecture found in structures where manuscripts were kept and used. Ideas from and about texts often guided artists and craftsmen in their creative work. And the transmission of Buddhist manuscript works from one land to another also occasioned the spread of artistic styles. This extension of the ideas and forms of manuscripts into other aesthetic spheres reminds us to view Buddhist manuscript cultures as dynamic centers of literary and artistic activity. In her contribution to this volume, M.L. Pattaratorn Chirapravati discusses the development of monastic lineages and stylistic elements in the Thai Sukothai kingdom, which incorporated them in the context of its religious exchanges with Sri Lanka. As such, her chapter reminds us that manuscripts were usually linked spatially and conceptually with other sacred objects in premodern Buddhist communities.

At the same time, the importance and power attributed to Buddhist manuscripts derived from their status as the physical embodiments of the Dharma and functioned as sacred objects in their own right. Scriptural testimony for the equation between the Buddha and the Dhamma—as seen famously in the statement made by the Buddha to a disciple in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* iii 120: "Whoever sees the *dhamma*, Vakkali, sees me; whoever sees me sees the *dhamma*"—signals that the tradition has long held that the Buddha is in some sense embodied in the Dharma he taught (Harrison 1992: 50). Not surprisingly, there is ample evidence in various Buddhist sects and communities that Buddhist manuscript texts were ritually venerated on altars and often continue to be treated with respect in Asian lands. Revered texts could take the form of complete works or parts of works that are used to represent the entire text or Dharma. For example, the worship of the physical representation of the title of the *Lotus Sutra* in the form of a calligraphic *maṇḍala* (*gohonzon*) devised by the medieval Japanese teacher Nichiren is but one widespread instance of the Buddhist veneration of texts (Stone 1999: 274). Alternatively, Buddhist textual material may be installed in images of the Buddha or *stūpa*s that supposedly contain the bodily remains of the Buddha or another enlightened being. A study of the rituals used to consecrate Buddha images in Thailand confirms that written Pāli *gātha*s were routinely installed inside such images to make them effective sources of power and deserving of veneration (Swearer 2004: 56–7). Likewise, there are frequent references in Mahāyāna literature to practices of enshrining and

venerating books, evidence that suggests that manuscripts were deeply involved in ritualized worship.

The power and significance attributed to Buddhist manuscripts has even been associated with the formation of Mahāyāna Buddhism in ancient India. Based on select references in some early Sanskrit texts, Gregory Schopen has argued for the presence of a cult of the book patterned after, and also in competition with, the Buddhist cult of relics in ancient India (Schopen 2005: 43–4). The elevation of certain physical texts to a status equal to or even above that of bodily relics deposited in *stūpa*s would in this way create new physical locations for ritual activity. With a ritual formula affirming that a spot of earth can become a true shrine, certain Sanskrit texts may have asserted that their very presence sanctifies the area around where they are kept and taught, inviting cultic displays of worship such as the offering of flowers and dancing to the manuscripts themselves (Schopen 2005: 51–2). Although some scholars may arrive at interpretations that differ somewhat from Schopen's view, his interpretation is consistent with the current scholarly consensus over the centrality of texts in the formation of Mahayana in ancient India. Occasional references to "dharma-relics" (*dharma-śarīra*) comprising whole texts, select verses (e.g., "*ye dhammā…*"), or textualized spells and mnemonic aids functioned like bodily relics to consecrate or enliven *stūpas* and images throughout South and Southeast Asia (Boucher 1991: 6–10; Strong 2004: 8–10).

While there undoubtedly was a ritual component associated with manuscripts in diverse Buddhist communities, there were also important pedagogical and didactic components. In premodern manuscript cultures, physical texts formed the scarce resources with which aspiring monastics and, on occasion, devout laypersons were taught. Monastic libraries would typically hold any number of manuscripts of Buddhist texts, which often formed the basis for training and educating monks in the Dharma. Apart from canonical *sūtra*s, manuscripts of commentaries, translations, grammars, sermon texts, meditation manuals, and other kinds of works were accessible to those seeking instruction and wisdom. Herein, Justin McDaniel contributes an essay related to pedagogical uses of manuscripts, and he has written elsewhere on how the formations of manuscript anthologies and commentarial glosses defined the ideas of canon and curriculum in Thailand and Laos (McDaniel 2005: 310–12). While the intellectual engagement with manuscript texts may seem limited largely to a literate monastic elite, the use of manuscripts for educational purposes was nonetheless a crucial factor in determining whether the Sangha could be established and sustained in a given area.

The production of Buddhist manuscript texts entailed a variety of production and storage methods that could vary significantly from one community or region to another. What is clear, however, is that Buddhist manuscript cultures involved tremendous material and human resources to generate and maintain the texts that were read, recited, copied, venerated, decorated, and deposited. The substantial differences between Asian Buddhist and European Christian manuscripts notwithstanding, there are useful comparisons to be drawn between the manuscript cultures of both regions. Certainly, given the range of characteristics inherent in manuscripts copied and recopied by hand, one could expect that

Asian Buddhist manuscripts would share at least some features with European Christian ones.

For Dagenais, medieval Spanish manuscripts reveal that glosses added to the text signify ethical choices in reading that were necessitated by the variation, imprecision, and errors regularly encountered in handwritten texts (Dagenais 1994: 16). In time, such glosses would make manuscripts collective projects where groups of writers and readers collaborate in the production of meaning. Similarly, Elizabeth J. Bryan has described how groups of writers and readers joined in the collaborative creation of texts in the absence of the standardization and fixedness of works produced in modern print culture (Bryan 1999: 4–8). Buddhist manuscript cultures could be expected to function along similar lines. Manuscript texts and readers in Asian communities would in many, if not most, cases be confronted with similar limitations (and opportunities) that derived from the materials and practices used to produce texts. The texts they encountered were, in Bryan's words, a "mix of voices" that superseded the author's unitary voice and consciousness (Bryan 1999: 50).

Scholars of Buddhist manuscript cultures may also find that some of the interpretive frames used by European medievalists are helpful in reading Asian texts. The modern study of Buddhist manuscripts owes much to the techniques and terminology of the codicology established by earlier humanist scholars of Latin, Greek, and other sources from around the Middle East (Scherrer-Schaub 1999: 3–4). As we will see in the following narration, many of the methods used to reconstruct and date manuscript texts have been borrowed from other fields such as Medieval Studies and Biblical Studies. Thus, the questions brought to study of manuscripts by those scholars may often be replicated or altered for use in the study of Buddhist cultures as well. For instance, it is possible and perhaps even advisable for scholars studying Buddhist manuscripts to look at their sources in ways similar to medievalists, asking how "an individual, concrete manuscript book came into being, grew through accretions of gloss, commentary, and irrelevant marginal jottings, moved through both space and time, and was, in many cases, transformed into another individual, concrete manuscript book" (Dagenais 1994: 18). Or we may explore what Gabrielle Spiegel terms "the social logic of the text," wherein manuscripts are seen to occupy "determinate social spaces" as both the products of authors and as textual agents that mirror and generate particular social realities (Spiegel 1997: 24). Or we may, like Armando Petrucci, embark on more systematic studies of manuscripts to determine how notions of authors, writing, and reading were generally conceived in Buddhist Asia (Petrucci 1995). The possibilities of adapting models judiciously from other fields to fill in our conceptions of Buddhist manuscript cultures are numerous indeed.

Scholarship on Buddhist manuscripts

In an age where printed editions and translations of key Buddhist texts are accessible, if not plentiful, it is easy to forget the fact that the modern study of Buddhism developed chiefly out of philologically based research on manuscripts

from different Asian cultures. Once European scholars located scriptural texts and acquired the linguistic skills to read them, they turned to manuscripts as the primary means for gaining knowledge about Buddhism. Modern colonialism provided numerous scholars, missionaries, and civil servants with the motivation and opportunity to explore the various religions and cultures in Asia. Many of the texts they first encountered were in manuscript form, and these works were collected and often shipped back to European libraries and institutes for further study. For instance, Eugène Burnouf based his nineteenth-century translations of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, *Divyāvadāna*, and other Sanskrit texts on some of the 88 Sanskrit manuscripts obtained in Nepal and sent to Paris by Brian Houghton Hodgson (Jong 1987: 19). Similarly, the Danish linguist Rasmus Rask visited Sri Lanka during 1821–1822 and collected numerous Pāli and Sinhala manuscripts that he brought back to Copenhagen, spurring work in Pāli studies (Jong 1987: 18). Many other Buddhist manuscripts were thus acquired by European institutions and served largely as the basis upon which early scholars developed their knowledge and discourse about Buddhism.

The value of Buddhist manuscripts to early western scholars of Buddhism was enormous. It was through these texts that people in the West developed knowledge of Buddhist doctrine and literature. Buddhism had become, in Philip Almond's words, a "textual object" defined more by its rich collection of ancient texts than by its contemporary practitioners (Almond 1988: 24–6). Scholars inquiring into the foundations of the Buddhist religion—a religion seen to be present across much of Asia—consistently turned to manuscript texts for answers. Major discoveries of ancient manuscripts in the first few decades of the twentieth century boosted the study of Buddhist manuscripts. Four German expeditions to Turfan (in Xinjiang of NW China) during 1902–1914 uncovered many priceless treasures including large quantities of manuscripts in Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, Turkish, Uighur, and other languages (Huntington 1907: 270–1). Many of these were brought back to Germany and studied. Likewise, around 1900, a huge collection of ancient manuscripts was discovered in a cave complex along the Silk Route near Dunhuang in China. Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot led expeditions to recover the treasures in 1906 and 1907, which resulted in the shipment of a great number of Dunhuang manuscripts in Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Khotanese, Sogdian, and other languages to London, New Delhi, and Paris (Fujieda 1966: 3–6).

Then, in 1931, a chance discovery of a cache of Sanskrit manuscripts from around the fifth or sixth centuries stored in an ancient *stūpa* at Gilgit in what is today northern Pakistan produced what was by far the oldest extant Indian Buddhist texts (Dutt 1984, vol. I: i–ii). The Turfan, Dunhuang, and Gilgit manuscripts were distinctive for their great antiquity, often many centuries older than the manuscripts from Nepal, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere. These discoveries reinvigorated the study of Buddhist manuscripts and continue to be examined today. More recently, toward the last decade of the twentieth century, discoveries of manuscripts and manuscript fragments believed to be from the Bamiyan region in eastern Afghanistan have yielded even older texts that have generated considerable enthusiasm and received attention from scholars. Several dozen birch bark scrolls written in the Gandhāri

language and Kharoṣṭhī script from around the first to third centuries have turned up and were acquired by the British Library and a private collector who have allowed scholars to examine these materials (see Salomon 1999; 2003). Another large private collection of early birch bark, palm leaf, and vellum manuscripts written mainly in Sanskrit and the Brāhmī script was made available to scholarly researchers in the 1990s (see Braarvig 2000).

Current scholarship on Buddhist manuscripts encompasses a wide range of editorial, philological, and historical research pursued by a growing number of scholars. These scholars view Buddhist manuscripts as rich sources for developing new understandings about the tradition's history and literature. The abundant stores of manuscripts collected throughout Asia and stored in Western libraries and institutes, as well as manuscript collections held in Asian countries, provide researchers with a vast body of texts to examine. It is possible, for instance, for scholars to locate new texts and new genres that were previously unknown and also to find different forms of previously known texts that cast the latter in a new light (Salomon 1999: 9). Such manuscripts offer unique insights and variant readings to scholars who are studying or editing particular texts. It is likewise the case that comparing manuscript texts allows the researcher to reconstruct the processes of textual transmission and production, as well as to arrive closer to the original meaning of the text before it was translated or quoted elsewhere (Steinkellner 1988: 105–8). Furthermore, manuscripts may reveal the broader and more diverse history of texts and doctrine in the tradition, a diversity that was often obscured by the formations of Buddhist canons of scripture and the accompanying moves to suppress controversies and interpretations deemed heretical or unorthodox (Salomon 1999: 9). Examining the manuscript record further magnifies the condition of textual diversity in Buddhism, a condition that is hinted at by the existence of different Buddhist canons but often overlooked by researchers who work exclusively with modern printed editions of texts.

Given the specialized and technical nature of research in Buddhist manuscripts, much of the recent research in this field has appeared in publication series devoted to manuscripts or journals with interests in philology. Some works serve chiefly as catalogues for extensive manuscript collections such as the nine volumes of *Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden* published in Germany (see Waldschmidt, et al. 1966–1995; Bechert and Wille 2000–2004). Sometimes such catalogs contain extensive selections of texts and translations, such as the seven volumes of the *Catalogue of the Hugh Nevill Collection of Sinhalese Manuscripts in the British Library* (Somadasa 1987–1995). A more recent series titled *Materials for the Study of the Tripitaka* has been launched in conjunction with the Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation to catalogue and examine Pāli and vernacular texts in Southeast Asia (Skilling and Pakdeekham 2002). Related to these collection-wide projects, there are other initiatives involving the preservation and digitization of Buddhist manuscripts to stabilize them and make them more widely accessible. There is one such project underway with the Guardian of the Flame Sri Lanka Manuscript Collection at the Arizona State University Libraries. The cataloguing and publication of lists of manuscript works held in various libraries

and institutions around the world are critically important steps to facilitate more research in this area.

In addition to cataloguing efforts, recent research on Buddhist manuscripts has also involved collaborative studies of particular sets of manuscripts from various collections. One example of this collaborative textual work is the Buddhist Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection (BMSC) project that began in the late 1990s under the general editorship of Jens Braarvig. Three published volumes of studies of ancient manuscript fragments from this large private collection have appeared to date and more are expected (see Braarvig 2000–2006). The Schøyen Collection contains important fragments of materials from the first few centuries of the Common Era that were likely recovered around the Bamiyan region in eastern Afghanistan. Another project launched by Richard Salomon is investigating the birch bark scrolls in the British Library's Kharoṣṭhī manuscript collection and is publishing its results. The Gandhāran Buddhist Texts series has so far published three specialized studies of various fragments—and intends to produce more publications of these works that have been tentatively dated as originating in the first to second centuries CE (see Salomon 2000). Meanwhile, another group of scholars is researching the manuscripts and other materials from the ancient Tabo monastery, an important site of Tibetan Buddhist learning, in what is now Himachal Pradesh (see Scherrer-Schaub and Steinkellner 1999). These textual materials, dating from the tenth to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, are believed to yield new historical data on Buddhist life and literature in Western Tibet.

Other notable manuscript research has appeared in the form of journal articles. Such articles typically examine a smaller range of materials for a more specific purpose than what is found in collaborative, book-length studies. For example, Salomon has published an article that describes the Senior Collection of 24 birch bark scrolls in terms of the clay jar in which they were found, their generic character and contents, and the peculiarities of their script and language (Salomon 2003). Other articles often discuss the identification or discovery of a significant manuscript not previously known. In 1996, Jens-Uwe Hartmann corrected the mistaken identification of what appears to be an eleventh-century manuscript of the *Samādhirājasūtra* and supplied a list of the major variants and mistakes it contains compared to the Gilgit and Nepalese versions of the text (Hartmann 1996). And Matsuda Kazunobu has reported his discovery of some fragments of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* that were improperly categorized in the Stein/Hoernle Collection of manuscripts from Dunhuang in London and subsequently created three new plates of the *sūtra* from the fragments he found (Matsuda 1987).

Research articles may also be used to discuss some preliminary findings related to a manuscript or group of manuscripts that are not well known. For instance, Jinadasa Liyanaratne examined 12 Sri Lankan medical manuscripts kept in English libraries to describe Buddhist influences on traditional medicine and the spread of tantric Siddha medicine to Sri Lanka (Liyanaratne 2001). Also, scholars occasionally publish short editions or translations of material found only in manuscripts. For instance, Charles Hallisey published an edition of a Pāli *sutta* not included in the Pāli Text Society's edition of the Pāli Canon using seven manuscript witnesses

obtained in libraries around London (Hallisey 1990b). And W. Blythe Miller has translated a short Tibetan manuscript and discussed its significance in the formation and conceptualization of a new Buddhist lineage in twelfth–thirteenth-century Tibet (Miller 2006). Taken together, the aforementioned articles give some sense of the wide range of scholarship currently being done on specific Buddhist manuscripts.

Why "Buddhist Manuscript Cultures"

As a collection, the contributions to *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures* expand upon scholarly research on Buddhist manuscripts by shifting the focus from particular texts to the cultural contexts in which manuscripts were created and used. It is our conviction that Buddhist manuscripts not only contain significant textual material, but they also point to religious notions concerning textuality and reveal aspects of broader social, cultural, and ritual realities. While acknowledging the critical and continuing importance of philological studies of Buddhist manuscripts, the authors herein express an interest in reflecting more broadly on the production and use of manuscripts in premodern Buddhist cultures. Significant historical information can be gleaned from the study of Buddhist manuscripts, material that goes beyond strictly the language, writing style, and other internal characteristics found in a given work. The chapters presented here explore Buddhist manuscripts as works that comprise a range of religious, artistic, technological, and ideological practices and illuminate the historical significance and uses of Buddhist literature in different cultural contexts.

A variety of institutions and conventions for producing and writing books accompanied the production of Buddhist manuscripts in different forms and eras. Given the great importance attributed to the contents of works on the Dharma, people living in Buddhist manuscript cultures developed a wide variety of ways to bestow value and significance to the actual works they produced. And the manuscripts themselves often played critical roles in ritual practice, ethical development, artistic expression, cultural exchange, educational formation, institutional establishment, and other areas that shaped the development of Buddhism. It is the attempt to investigate the interdependent modalities of religious practice, text, and context—issues on which scholars of literature and history have long been focused—that motivate the studies in this volume. By looking beyond the particular aspects of a single manuscript text, the authors seek to learn more about what manuscripts in general can tell us about how Buddhists once conceived of and practiced a religion that they believed had been transmitted since the time of the Buddha.

In this way, the chapters in *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures* make an intervention in traditional studies of Buddhist manuscripts. The focus on manuscripts as historical evidence of broader ideologies and larger cultural processes is reminiscent of the intervention that the New Philology made in the field of Medieval Studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In his controversial book *Éloge de la variante* (1989), Bernard Cerquiglini claimed that medieval French manuscript writing was

subjected to endless rewriting, making variance *the* primary characteristic of such texts and rendering traditional philological methods of editing manuscripts suspect. By contrast, the New Philology sought to focus on intertextuality and the diversity of readings evidenced in different textual witnesses (see Cerquiglini 1999). New Philology portrayed itself as a return to the medieval origins of philology with its roots in a manuscript culture and asserted the importance of manuscripts as material artifacts that were produced in concert with various visual images and annotations by entire sets of artists and artisans who projected their social attitudes and rivalries into manuscripts (Nichols 1990: 1, 7).

New Philology also implied a critique of older philological methods of editing texts. One method, associated with Karl Lachmann (1793–1851), sought to reconstruct an hypothetical "original" text by comparing the variant readings of multiple manuscripts and using shared errors to construct a genealogical tree (*stemma codicum*) of families of works that were copied from the same source. Editors of manuscript texts who followed Lachmannian principles devalorized the actual works of scribes in favor of a hypothetical model of the author's original text (Dembowski 1993: 515). Traditional philology after Lachmann sought to determine which reading is most authentic by comparing and grouping manuscripts in order to emend them and produce the best possible text (Trachsler 2006: 18). Whether working with Old French or Buddhist manuscripts, scholars who seek to produce a "critical edition" of extant manuscript sources typically employ some features of Lachmann's *stemma* approach. In the early twentieth century, Joseph Bédier (1864–1936) departed from Lachmann's method and advocated choosing the single best manuscript for editing a text. Bédier's method of historical realism sought to preserve, without restoration, as much as possible from a particular work and emend it as little as possible (Dembowski 1993: 521). For instance, the production of diplomatic editions of Buddhist texts based on unique manuscripts in terms of their age or number of extant copies is a practice aligned with Bédier's approach.

Cerquiglini faulted both of these earlier philological methods of editing medieval manuscripts. To him, Lachmann's emphasis on tracking common errors to reconstruct the original text led an illusory reproduction of a text that never existed (Cerquiglini 1999: 49, 71). Although preferable to Lachmann's in Cerquiglini's eyes, Bédier's approach provided no picture of the inherent variance of medieval writing and reduced texts to the stable, closed works of modernity (Cerquiglini 1999: 70–1). Cerquiglini's critique has produced its own share of detractors. Some argue that a single manuscript work—the form of the text that most scribes and readers encountered—could hardly exhibit the variance that Cerquiglini anachronistically claims was *the* definitive condition of medieval writing (Busby 1993: 32–5). But his critique succeeded in raising significant issues about how scholars read and edit manuscripts. Advocates of New Philology embraced Cerquiglini's emphasis on textual variance, the work of scribes, and the materiality of manuscripts over emphasizing authors or an *Ur*-text. These positions resonated well with contemporary interests in postmodern theory (Trachsler 2006: 20–1).

Unlike Cerquiglini and the New Philologists, however, the authors in this volume do not seek to discredit and overturn traditional philological approaches to premodern manuscripts. There is much use to be found in both critical and diplomatic editions of Buddhist texts, and we dare say that we all greatly admire—and some of us engage in—the painstaking work of scholars who reconstruct, edit, and translate ancient Buddhist texts from manuscript sources that are between two thousand and two hundred or so years old. The reconstruction of ancient texts, the philological analysis of their contents, and the historical examination of how they were produced and transmitted through the ages are all valuable scholarly practices. We do, however, have some interests that coincide with the efforts of New Philology to recognize and study interactions between the language of a text, the manuscript matrix, and the social contexts and networks they inscribed (Nichols 1990: 9).

Scholars of Buddhist Studies continue to engage productive questions about premodern Buddhist conceptions that governed the production of texts, writing, and art, among other basic subjects of religious expression. There remains a pressing need to examine manuscripts in order to delineate patterns of textual transmission, conceptions of the author and the scribe, ideologies of writing and reading, expressions of literary and artistic preferences, the ritual use of Buddhist texts, the relative integrity of single works, and the social networks that supported to production and care of manuscripts, among other aspects of manuscript cultures. By focusing on Buddhist manuscripts as material culture and ritual objects that conditioned the ways that Buddhists in premodern Asia lived in the world, we can begin to see how texts shaped and informed religious worldviews, cultural practices, and the lived realities of Buddhists. We therefore encourage additional research into the manuscript cultures of premodern Buddhist communities alongside the continued examinations and reconstructions of ancient texts, and view these approaches as complementary, not inimical, in our efforts to apprehend the history and practices of the Buddhist religion.

Present themes

As a collection, the essays in this volume take up recurrent themes that highlight certain conjunctures in the cultural production of Buddhist manuscripts across premodern Asia. They also examine practices integrally tied to the production of the texts and the ritual use of texts as material objects that embody transcendent teachings of the Buddha. These transcendent qualities of the dharma could be expressed in texts, inscribed on birch bark, palm leaf or stone, commemorated through recitation, and sculpted in artistic shapes or cosmic architecture. Such encompassing perspectives on Buddhist manuscript cultures show that the Buddhist production of manuscripts is informed by an array of closely linked cultural contexts and practices. The scholarly appreciation of Buddhist manuscript cultures, therefore, cannot be confined to a single medium of expression, such as writing, visual art, or recitation, but must be guided by the imaginative interpretations of the Buddhist paradigm across the ages.

The contributions reflect a geographic distribution of manuscript cultures across the Buddhist world, ranging from Central Asia (Wallace) to South Asia (Salomon, Berkwitz, Skilling, Hartmann and Emmrich), to Southeast Asia (McDaniel and Chirapravati) and East Asia (Heller). To encourage the reader's attentiveness to thematic conjunctures across Buddhist traditions, the collection is divided into four thematic groups, although other constellations may equally well illustrate continuities in the writing and practice of Buddhist manuscript cultures.

The first group focuses on the ideologies of manuscript cultures, their ritual extensions, and religious aspirations. Based on his analysis of Gandhāran textual fragments from four distinct collections, Richard Salomon explores possible motivations behind the ritual burial of these texts in clay jars. He proposes that they likely functioned as ritual equivalents of the Buddha's relics and that donors commissioned them to ensure the continuity of the *buddhavacana*. Stephen Berkwitz's contribution draws on his work on manuscripts from Sri Lanka, including the Guardian of the Flame Collection at Arizona State University. He notes that, while the material record of manuscript transmission is necessarily haphazard, that record also embodies a great deal of physical labor and social capital invested in manuscript production in order to gain merit for the future.

In the second part, Skilling, Wallace, and Hartmann examine the conventions of writing in the transmission of Buddhist manuscript cultures. Peter Skilling looks at the historical developments, the transmission of the Dhamma from redaction to written texts, and their role in the formation of Buddhist schools. Vesna Wallace's essay opens our purview to Mongolian traditions of Buddhist writings and text production, while Jens Uwe Hartmann describes the transformation from recited to written words in South Asia.

Authorial exchanges, custodial librarianship, and public recitations of texts that constitute temple treasures comprise the focus of the third section in which these issues are discussed against the advent of printed Buddhist texts. In Natasha Heller's essay, letters exchanged by an eminent Chinese Chan calligrapher and a high-ranking scholar-official-artist, offer public documentation of personal concerns and cultural settings that accompanied the printed production of Buddhist manuscripts in China. Justin McDaniel investigates the custodianship of two monastic librarians and scribes in Northern Thailand and their influence on vernacular historiography at a moment of modernizing reforms. The quest for perfection despite inevitable deviations that creep into the public recitation and transmission of a Buddhist text embedded in contemporary Newari culture form the subject of Christoph Emmrich's contribution in this volume.

The volume concludes with a focus on the inscription of Buddhist meaning in artistic, sculptural, and architectural forms. The interchangeable modalities of writing and veneration in Buddhist manuscript cultures are taken up again in the essays by Nandadeva and Chirapravati. Bilinda Devage Nandadeva develops the argument that the primary motivation for depicting flowers on Sinhalese illustrated manuscript covers is not ornamentation, but ritual devotion analogous to the practice of floral offerings made to the Buddha. The collection concludes with Pattaratorn Chirapravati's insightful observations on another transformation from

Buddhist manuscript culture to its visual representation in art and architecture. She argues that copying cosmological concepts in artistic spaces such as temple designs in ancient Thailand and Sri Lanka was commensurate with the re-creation of sacred space and a transcendent presence embodied in Buddhist manuscript cultures.[5] Thus, her essay returns the discussions contained in this collection, full circle, to the point of their departure.

Notes

1 A useful summary of the formations of and variations in Indian Buddhist canons appears in Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin (Louvain: Catholic University of Louvain, 1988), 149–192.

2 On the textually based origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism, see Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path according to* The Inquiry of Ugra (Ugraparipṛcchā) (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003). Whereas earlier generations of scholars commonly associated the rise of a Mahāyāna "school" with the appearance of certain philosophical works in Sanskrit, an increasing number of contemporary scholars seem to favor separating these two historical events, raising doubts over whether any coherent Mahāyāna movement could have existed as early as some of the texts that would later become associated with this community.

3 These often followed a practice known also in China and Korea of writing and painting in gold and silver inks on indigo-dyed paper; for a general discussion see Mason (2005: 159–61). Objects relating to tenth- and eleventh-century Japanese *sūtra* burials, including *sūtra* containers of metal and ceramic ware, were first brought to the wider attention of art historians in Rosenfield and Shimada (1970: 56–65). For related examples see Rosenfield and ten Grotenhuis (1979) and Pal and Meech-Pekarik (1988). For Korean examples of the fourteenth century, see Smith (1998: 171–75). For a discussion of Japanese illustrated texts of the *Lotus Sūtra* as well as narrative and devotional paintings based on the text, see Tanabe (1988). Many early Chinese examples of illuminated *sūtra*s must have perished in the temporary persecution of Buddhism in 845–7. For later Chinese examples, see Weidner and Berger (1994). These East Asian traditions are relatively well known and the editors refer readers to these sources. The effort in the present volume is to highlight other, less well known, Buddhist traditions of textual transmission and illustration.

4 The Manchu Emperors of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), especially Kangxi (r. 1662–1722) and Qianlong (r. 1736–1795), copied *sūtra*s on a regular basis. In producing thousands of such copies, they combined Chinese literati practice with Tibetan Buddhist devotion (Berger 2005: 132).

5 Relationships between texts and architectural design may be suggested in studies of Buddhist sites in China as well. See, for example, Lutz 1991.

Part I

Ideologies

2 Why did the Gandhāran Buddhists bury their manuscripts?

Richard Salomon

Until recently, only one manuscript representing the literature of the Gandhāran tradition of the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent was known, namely the "Gāndhārī Dharmapada" (to be discussed below). However, within the last fifteen years, four major collections of Gandhāran manuscripts have come to light and are accessible for study,[1] so that by now over one hundred specimens in all, most of them more or less fragmentary, are known. To date only a fraction of these new manuscripts have been fully published,[2] but overall descriptions and catalogues of three of the major collections are or will shortly be available,[3] and detailed editions of many of the remaining manuscripts are in progress.

The collections in question consist of groups of several manuscripts, typically about two dozen, written on birch bark scrolls or, less frequently, unbound palm leaves. The manuscripts in question date from the first three centuries of the Christian era[4] and are written in the Kharoṣṭhī script and the Gāndhārī language, a Middle Indo-Aryan dialect related to Sanskrit and Pāli. All of the manuscripts contain Buddhist texts of very diverse types and genres. In this article, however, we are not concerned with the textual contents of these manuscripts;[5] the focus will be on their ritual functions as sacred objects, rather than as texts proper. In particular, it is evident that in some if not all of the cases concerned, the manuscripts were not casually discarded, but were carefully deposited in a way that was designed to sanctify, preserve, and protect them. The main question will therefore be: "What were the conceptions and intentions of the persons responsible for these ritual interments of Gandhāran manuscripts?"

Unfortunately, our understanding of this question is seriously hampered by the circumstances of their discovery. To date, none of the major groups of Gandhāran manuscripts was found in the course of formal and well-documented archaeological excavations, and the majority of them have come to light through the antiquities market, so that their exact provenance and the circumstances of their discovery are known, if at all, only through unreliable reports or rumors. All that we know with reasonable certainty is that these manuscripts were found in northern Pakistan, eastern Afghanistan, and eastern Xinjiang. For at least two important collections, we have relatively secure information as to, at least, their approximate provenance. These are the Bajaur collection, named for its place of discovery in

the Bajaur Agency in northwestern Pakistan, adjoining the Afghan border (Strauch 2007: 5) and the Schøyen manuscripts, which were found at or near Bamiyan in Afghanistan. Two other major groups, the British Library and Senior Collections, were reported to have been found in the area around Haḍḍa in eastern Afghanistan, but this provenance, while plausible, remains to be confirmed.

Fortunately, even though we have no detailed and reliable information about the original disposition and archaeological context of the Gandhāran manuscripts, we are still not totally in the dark about their circumstances. Most importantly, in two cases, the clay jars in which the manuscripts were discovered have been preserved together with them, and in both cases the jars bear inscriptions in Kharoṣṭhī/Gāndhārī which provide important, albeit indirect, clues about the circumstances of the interment of the manuscripts. The first case is the British Library Collection, which was the first of the groups of Gandhāran manuscripts that have recently come to light. This collection of twenty-nine scrolls was found inside a clay pot with an inscription reading *saghami caüdiśami dhamaüteaṇa [p]arig[r]ahami*, "[Given] to the universal community, in the possession of the Dharmaguptakas".[6]

However, this inscription has no direct reference to or connection with the manuscripts that were found in the pot. Rather, it is donative in nature, recording the original gift of the pot—not of the manuscripts—to some adherents of the Dharmaguptaka lineage. This is clear from the fact that the inscription corresponds in form and content to similar donative inscriptions recorded on utensils and practical objects—as opposed to inscriptions recording the ritual dedication of relics and *stūpas*—which were given to Buddhist monastic institutions. Compare, for example, the donative inscription on a copper ladle found at Taxila: *iśparakasa daṇamukho saṃghe catudiśe utararame takṣaśilae kaśaviaṇa parigra[he]*, "Gift of Īśvaraka to the congregation of the four quarters in the Uttarārāma of Takṣaśilā, in the acceptance of the Kāśyapīyas" (Konow 1929: 88). Although the inscription on the British Library jar, like the Taxila ladle inscription, does not include a specification of the object donated, many Kharoṣṭhī donative inscriptions on pots do explicitly label them as "water-pot" (*paṇi-ghaḍa*). For example, another pot in the British Library bears the inscription *aya panighaḍe saghe cadurdiśami acaryana sarvastivatana parigrahami pu[r]nagarañami*, "This water-pot [is a gift] to the universal community, in the possession of the Sarvāstivādin teachers in the Purnaka monastery" (Salomon 1999: 2000). Thus there can be no doubt that the inscription on the pot which contained the British Library scrolls was intended to record the donation of a simple water jug, and nothing more, to a Dharmaguptaka monastery; it has no relation, direct or even implied, to the manuscripts which were found in the pot.[7] The use of the pot as a container in which to bury the manuscripts is thus clearly secondary. The pot was originally presented to the monastery simply as a practical utensil and was later recycled as a receptacle for the ritual burial of a group of manuscripts.

As to the specific location of the burial of the pot containing the manuscripts, we have, of course, no reliable testimony, but we can make some reasonable guesses by comparisons with better-documented discoveries of related materials. First of all,

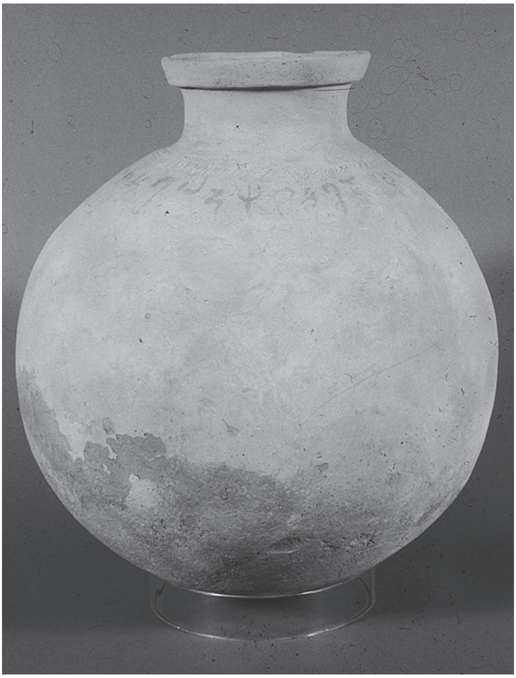


Figure 2.1 Clay pot containing the British Library Gāndhārī manuscripts. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.



Figure 2.2 View from top of the British Library pot, showing the manuscripts within. Courtesy of Isao Kurita.

it is fairly evident that pots containing manuscripts were treated as analogous to those which contained human remains, and which have been relatively well documented in archaeological excavations at Gandhāran *stūpa* sites, particularly in the Haḍḍa area. For instance, excavations at Haḍḍa conducted by Jules Barthoux in the 1920s yielded evidence of both human remains and manuscript fragments in similar situations in clay pots, and possibly even in the same pots, although this is not quite clear from Barthoux's frustratingly vague descriptions.[8]

The typical locations of such funereal vessels, and presumably also of the similar ones containing manuscript fragments, have been clarified in a recent study by Zemaryalaï Tarzi, who notes (2005: 224) that they were often "set at the foot of the exterior walls of the monasteries, where they were half-embedded against the foundations but still visible to the naked eye" (*... posés au pied des murs extérieurs des monastères. Ils y ont été à moitié enchâssés contre des soubassements mais en même temps visibles à l'œil nu*). Tarzi's maps of the Tape Shotor and Tape Tope Kalān sites at Haḍḍa (p. 212, fig. 2; p. 214, fig. 3 [reproduced here as fig. 2.3]) show that assemblages of such funerary vessels were located against the outside walls along the southern or western sides of the courts surrounding the main *stūpa*s, opposite the main entrances on the eastern side (Tarzi 2005: 224–5).[9] If we are correct to assume that manuscript burials were treated analogously to the burial of human remains, and especially if the reports that the British Library scrolls

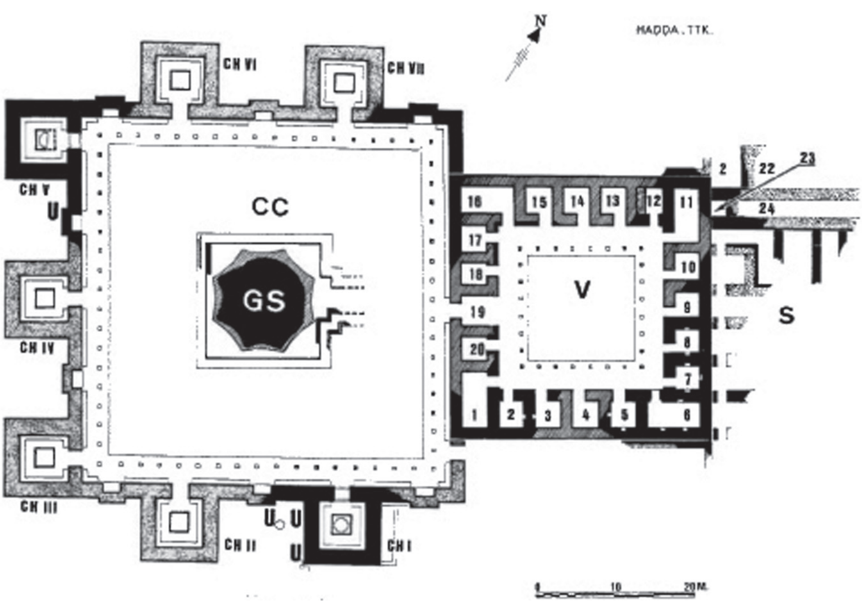


Figure 2.3 Plan of the Tape Tope Kalān site at Haḍḍa, showing the location of funerary urns, indicated by "U". From Z. Tarzi and D. Vaillancourt, eds., *Art et archéologie des monastères gréco-bouddhiquea du Nord-Ouest de l'Inde et de l Asie centrale*, Paris: De Boccard, 2005; p. 214, fig. 3. (Courtesy Z. Tarzi.)

originally came from the Haḍḍa area are true, they may well have originally been set in a similar position in some *stūpa*-monastery complex.

However, it is also possible that the pots containing manuscripts were interred within the main *stūpa* court, in one of the small *stūpa*s which typically surround the central *stūpa* in Gandhāran complexes. Although deposits of reliquaries in small Gandhāran *stūpa*s have frequently been documented in the past, Tarzi's recent publication also provides an interesting new example from *stūpa* 19 at Tape Shotor. As shown in the map of this site in Tarzi 2005: 212, fig. 2, this subsidiary *stūpa* was located immediately to the north of the main *stūpa*. According to Tarzi's description (p. 258) and illustration (p. 284, fig. 15 [reproduced here as fig. 2.4]), this relic deposit consisted of a fragment of bone placed within a gold box, which was placed in a larger silver box, which in turn was inside a bronze box. This ensemble was set in a clay jar together with two piles of twelve coins of the Kuṣāṇa period, and the jar was then set inside a cubic container of limestone which was covered by two slabs of schist, one above the other.

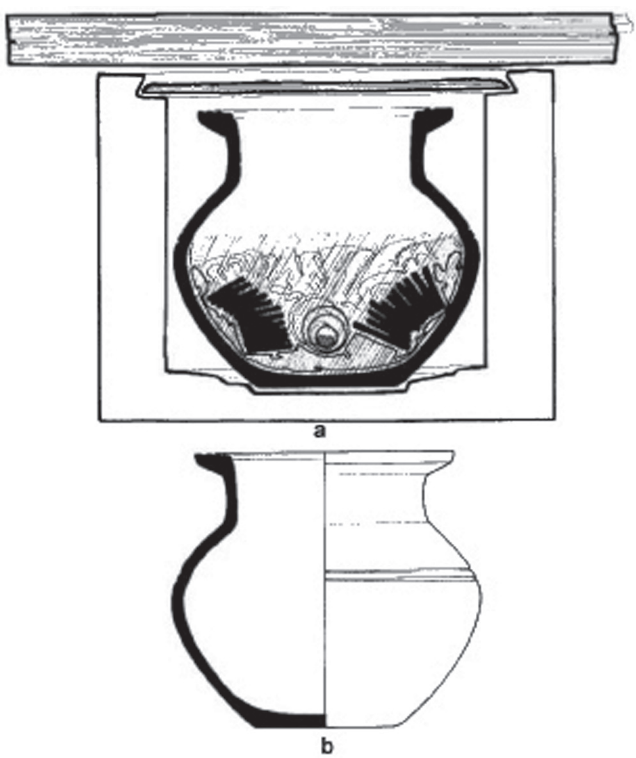


Figure 2.4 Reliquary deposit at Tape Shotor, Haḍḍa. From Z. Tarzi and D. Vaillancourt, eds., *Art et archéologie des monastères gréco-bouddhique du Nord-Ouest de l'Inde et de l" Asie centrale*, Paris: De Boccard, 2005; p. 284, fig. 15. (Courtesy Z. Tarzi.)

In any case, it is highly likely that the pot that contained the British Library manuscripts was originally interred in a Gandhāran *stūpa*-cum-monastery site in one or the other of the two types of situation described above. Given the destruction that has been inflicted on the Haḍḍa site in recent years and the instability that, as of this writing, still prevails in the area around Jalalabad—not to mention the uncertainty as to whether the manuscripts really are from Haḍḍa at all—it is unlikely that it will ever be possible to confirm this hypothesis. However, we can at least hope that some day we will be lucky enough to find Gandhāran manuscripts interred in a similar situation at some other location, in a legitimately documented archaeological context.

As for the manuscripts contained in the British Library pot, they are a very mixed lot indeed. The twenty-nine fragmentary scrolls contain at least two dozen distinct texts of very diverse contents and genres, written by twenty-one different scribes. Thus they seem to constitute a miscellaneous, unplanned, and more or less random collection. Furthermore, there is reason to think that although the scrolls have undoubtedly suffered a high degree of deterioration during the nearly two thousand years that they lay underground, at least some of them were already damaged or incomplete even before they were interred (Salomon 1999: 69–71). Moreover, interlinear words and phrases observed in several of the scrolls, reading *likhidago* "[It has been] written" or the like, can be interpreted as notations by secondary scribes indicating that new copies of the manuscripts had been completed so that the old ones were ready to be ritually discarded (ibid., pp. 71–6).

Based on this situation, I previously hypothesized (ibid., pp. 81–4) that the British Library scrolls constituted a ritual burial for old, "dead" manuscripts, that is, that they constituted a sort of "Buddhist genizah." In support of this interpretation, comparisons may be drawn with similar ritual laws or customary practices in many other parts of the ancient (and modern) world, for example in Tibet and China, or in Jewish and Islamic practice, according to which sacred scriptures and even, by extension, any written document had to be disposed of in a ritualized manner rather than destroyed or casually discarded.

This explanation for the rationale of the interment of the British Library scrolls is, however, by no means beyond doubt. For one thing, although taboos on the profanation of discarded scriptures are common in many cultures, I have not been able to locate any explicit textual reference to such a rule in Buddhist literature. Moreover, Lenz (2003: 108–10) has raised doubts as to whether the patterns of physical damage and the interlinear notations really prove that the scrolls were already old and fragmented when they were interred. He notes, for example (p. 109), that "it is possible that many of the B[ritish] L[ibrary] manuscripts were in good condition when they were interred." Moreover, Lenz proposes an alternative interpretation of the interlinear "*likhidago*" notations, not as the mark of a secondary copyist who had completed a new version of the texts in question, but as "the work of an inspector, supervisor, or instructor certifying the correctness and completion" (ibid., p. 110) of the manuscripts.

Both of these points are, in my opinion, still open to question. The interpretation of the interlinear scribal notation cannot be conclusively determined on the basis of

the surviving data. Lenz is no doubt right that much, even most of the deterioration of the British Library scrolls took place after their interment in antiquity, but there is nevertheless positive evidence that at least some of them were damaged and incomplete before the interment, as shown, for example by the compound scroll (British Library fragment 5) which consisted of the remnants of at least three originally separate scrolls (Salomon 2000: 20–7).

However this may be, further evidence has now come to light, which shows that, even if the "Buddhist genizah" explanation of the British Library manuscripts is valid, or even partially valid, it cannot explain the entire corpus of Gandhāran manuscript finds. This has been dramatically demonstrated by the discovery of the Senior Collection of manuscripts.[10] The Senior collection resembles the British Library group insofar as it consists of a set of some two dozen birch bark scrolls recording Buddhist texts in Gāndhārī, which were contained in a clay pot bearing an inscription. However, beyond this, the two collections also differ in important ways, particularly as regards their textual contents and their state of preservation.

As to the first point, whereas the British Library scrolls are an extremely diverse and apparently random collection of texts of different genres written by different scribes, the Senior scrolls are a unified corpus which were all written by the same scribe and which all belong to similar genres of *sūtra* or *sūtra*-like texts.[11] Thus, it is clear that they are "a commissioned collection" (Allon 2007: 4) and cannot possibly represent a random genizah-like compilation.

Moreover, it is equally clear that the Senior scrolls were in good condition when they were buried. Although many of the scrolls are now badly damaged and fragmentary, others, notably scrolls 19 and 20 (described in Allon 2007: 14; text sample in Salomon 2003: 87–9), are virtually intact and complete. This situation, combined with the textual unity of the group as a whole, must mean that the entire collection was intact when interred, whereas the damage incurred by many of the scrolls was caused by moisture and other contamination during their nearly two millennia of interment, and probably also by mishandling by unknown parties after their rediscovery.

Indeed, the Senior manuscripts were not only in good condition when they were buried, but may even have been brand new. They were certainly not old discarded manuscripts, and there is good reason to think that the set was written out specifically in order to be interred. Among the indications of this is the inclusion within the group of two scrolls (nos. 7 and 8) that present what seems to be a sort of outline or summary of the set as a whole. Although the precise relationship between these two "index scrolls" and the texts recorded on the rest of the Senior scrolls is complicated and uncertain,[12] it is certain that they constitute, in some way or other, the record of a coherent, preplanned corpus or anthology of texts which is at least partially embodied in the surviving manuscripts of the Senior collection. Particularly significant in this connection is the concluding notation at the bottom of the index scroll 8, reading "In all, fifty-five—55—*sūtra*s" (*sarvapiḍa sutra pacapacaïśa 20-20-10-4-1*; Salomon 2003: 83, Allon 2007: 19), proving that the corpus of texts referred to therein was understood as specifically defined and delimited.

As in the case of the British Library manuscripts, the Senior scrolls were found in a large clay pot bearing a Gāndhārī inscription. However, in this case the inscription is of a very different character. For whereas, as discussed above, the British Library pot inscription followed the standard formula for the donation of a utensil to a monastery, the one on the Senior pot[13] shows the formulaic pattern that is regularly associated with relic deposits or *stūpa* foundations, reading:

1 *[sa]ba[tsa]ra [ba](*ḍa)[śa](*mi) ma[se] a[vadu]nake sa[ste]hi (*paca)hi i[śa] (*kṣuṇa)mi [prati]tha[vi]? [matrapi]tra-p[uya]e sarva[satva]na [p]u(*ya)[e]*
2 *r(*o)haṇasa masumatraputrasa*

"In the year twelve, in the month Avadunaka, after (*five) days; at this time [this] was established in honor of [his] mother and father [and] in honor of all beings. [Gift] of Rohaṇa, son of Masumatra."

The key word here is *[prati]tha[vi]?*, which can be confidently restored as *pratithavi(*da)* ("established") or the like, this being the verb which is almost invariably used to record the foundation of relic deposits. This suggests that the inscription specifically records the dedication of its contents, namely the manuscripts, although it does not mention them explicitly; this, in contrast to the British Library inscription that merely commemorates the gift to the monastery of the pot on which it is written. The inscription on the Senior pot therefore has two important consequences with regard to the present discussion: first, it provides a specific date for the manuscripts, and second, it provides some hints as to the donor's conception of their character and function.

As for the date, the inscription refers to the twelfth year of an unspecified era which can, however, be quite securely identified on the grounds of the overall dating formula with the era of Kaniṣka.[14] Although the epoch of the Kaniṣka era remains controversial, the most likely hypothesis, in or around AD 127/8, would place this inscription at about AD 140. Moreover, such a dating has been supported by recent radiocarbon testing of the Senior scrolls (Allon, Salomon, Jacobsen, and Zoppi 2006).

However, more importantly in connection with the main topic of this article, the phrasing of the inscription implies that the donor or sponsor of the deposit considered the manuscripts to be functionally equivalent to bodily relics of the Buddha. There is of course nothing surprising in this, since the equivalence of bodily relics and "dharma-relics," that is, textual relics, is a familiar one in Buddhist tradition generally (see, for example, Allon 2007: 4). But what is remarkable here is that, in view of the condition of the scrolls and the inclusion of an index to them, the Senior scrolls were apparently written out for the express purpose of being interred in a *stūpa* or other funerary monument. This, it would seem, puts them in a very different category from the British Library manuscripts; the ramifications of this contrast will be discussed below.

We know of at least one other clear case in which a Gandhāran scroll was interred while still intact, or even possibly brand new. This is the aforementioned "Gāndhārī Dharmapada" (or as it now should be called, "Khotan Dharmapada"[15]), which for over a century was the only known manuscript text in Gāndhārī. This manuscript first came to light in 1892 and was reported to have been found next to a clay bowl in a cave at Kohmārī Mazār near Khotan in Chinese Central Asia (modern Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region). However, as usual, this hearsay report is likely to be inaccurate, and the circumstances of the discovery of other Gandhāran manuscripts suggest that the Dharmapada scroll might have been found in, rather than "next to" the bowl (Salomon 1999: 58–9). However this may be, the most important point for the matter at hand is the condition of the Dharmapada scroll. For, although it was subsequently torn by its unknown discoverer into three sections, one of which has never been recovered, the surviving sections indicate that it was complete (Brough 1962: 15) and in very good condition when it was found.

Unfortunately, this is all the information we have about the circumstances of the original deposit of the scroll, and we cannot even be sure that it was ritually interred, as is virtually certain to have been the case with the British Library and Senior manuscripts. For it is possible that its survival was due simply to the dry desert climate of Central Asia, rather than to interment in a sealed vessel, which enabled the other Gandhāran manuscripts to survive nearly two thousand years in the more rigorous climate of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Therefore, all that can be concluded is that the Khotan Dharmapada scroll *may* have been a ritual deposit—or, for all we know, part of one—and that, if so, it was, like the Senior scrolls, intact and possibly even new when interred.

We turn now to the third major group of Gandhāran manuscripts. This is a subset of the enormous Schøyen Collection of Buddhist manuscripts, which comprises several thousand fragments of miscellaneous texts dating from about the second or third to the sixth or seventh centuries AD. These texts are known to have been found somewhere in or around Bamiyan, Afghanistan, possibly at a site called Zargaran (Braarvig 2006: plates I-II), 1.2 kilometers east of the smaller of the colossal Buddhas that were destroyed in 2001 by the Taliban. The bulk of the Schøyen material consists of later Sanskrit manuscripts written in various forms of Brāhmī script, but it also includes over one hundred small fragments of earlier texts in Gāndhārī language and Kharoṣṭhī script, only a few of which have been published so far (Allon and Salomon 2000; Matsuda and Glass, forthcoming; Salomon, forthcoming). Unlike the British Library and Senior groups, which are written on continuous scrolls on birch bark, the Schøyen Kharoṣṭhī fragments came from *poṭhī*-style books made up of separate folios on palm leaves. As such, we typically find among the Schøyen Kharoṣṭhī materials fragments of one or several individual folios from the same manuscript, but never anything approaching a complete text or even a complete folio.

This situation may simply reflect "the luck of the draw," with the surviving fragments representing a chance remnant of the complete manuscripts which through some quirk of fate has happened to survive. However, there is also

another possible explanation: the sporadic character of the surviving fragments could constitute the remainder, not of deposits of complete manuscripts or even of substantial portions thereof, but rather of separately discarded damaged folios for which replacements had been substituted in the original texts, and which were then ritually deposited or interred. According to one unsubstantiated rumor, some of the Schøyen manuscripts were originally found inside a wooden box wrapped in a cloth inscribed with a *dhāraṇī*, which might have been a ritual container for such discarded folios.

If this hypothesis about the nature of the Schøyen Gāndhārī fragments is correct—though this, it must be admitted, is very far from certain—it would bring us back to something like the genizah scenario proposed in connection with the British Library scrolls. However, whatever be the exact circumstances and motivations of the deposit of the Schøyen fragments, in their very miscellaneous and seemingly random contents they resemble the British Library collection more than the carefully planned and organized Senior deposit. Therefore, we consider the possibility that there were different types of deposits of Gandhāran manuscripts, undertaken under different circumstances and perhaps with different motivations.

This suspicion is now strengthened by the recent discovery of yet another group of eighteen Gāndhārī birch bark scrolls, which to date have been introduced only in two preliminary articles (Khan and Khan 2004, Strauch 2007). In this case, we are somewhat better informed as to the original find-spot than with the other collections, since, according to information provided by their present owner, these scrolls were found at a point near the village of Mian Kili, at 34°49′24″ north by 71°40′17″ east, in the Bajaur Agency of Pakistan near the Afghan border, although this report is not entirely beyond doubt (Strauch 2007: 5–6). The manuscripts are said to have been "found in situ placed in a square chamber of stone slabs of about half a meter of diameter … found in one of the cell [sic] of the monastery" (Khan and Khan 2004: 10). No reference is made to earthen pots or any other such container (Strauch 2007: 6), although, in view of the unreliability of the cited report, it cannot be ruled out that there was one.

In terms of their overall contents and character, the eighteen scrolls in the Bajaur collection correspond more to the British Library and Schøyen groups than to the Senior collection, insofar as they are a very miscellaneous group of manuscripts of various genres, reflecting the work of at least nineteen different scribes (Strauch 2007: 8). Also like the British Library and Schøyen manuscripts, the Bajaur scrolls are all more or less fragmentary although, as usual in such cases, it is difficult to determine how much of the damage occurred after rather than before their interment. With these features in mind, Strauch (2007: 66) concluded "the comparison to a Jewish *genizah* brought forward by Salomon with regard to the British Library fragments (1999: 81–84) could be equally valid for the new Bajaur collection."

However, in view of the situation in which they were (allegedly) found, Strauch does not believe that the discarded manuscripts were ritually interred: "The deposition inside a stone chamber, however, is a new feature. Obviously,

the Bajaur manuscripts were not ritually buried but stored in a room within the precincts of a Buddhist monastery" (2007: 6–7). Strauch further observes, "It seems odd that old and worn-out manuscripts were sorted out and stored in one place, outside the regular library (for which a stone casket would be rather uncomfortable) but still in reach of the monks in case of urgent need. Probably, not all of the texts were partially destroyed. Some of them might have been sorted out for other reasons" (ibid., p. 66). Here, however, I disagree with Strauch's claim that the manuscripts were not ritually buried, because "a square chamber of stone slabs about half a meter of diameter" is in fact typical of chambers in which reliquaries were deposited in Gandhāran and other Buddhist *stūpa*s. For example, in central India, the relic chamber at Andher *stūpa* III, as described in Cunningham 1854: 225 and illustrated by him in pl. XXX.3–4, consisted of four stone slabs placed vertically with a fifth laid over them as a cover. Within the Gandhāran area, the relic chamber of the great *stūpa* of Māṇikiāla was similarly constructed according to its discoverer, General Court (as quoted in Prinsep 1834: 559): "At ten feet … from the level of the ground, we met with a cell in the form of a rectangular parallelogram, built in a solid manner, with well dressed stones, firmly united with mortar. The four sides of the cell corresponded with the four cardinal points, and it was covered with a single massive stone. Having turned this over, I perceived that it was covered with inscriptions."[16]

In light of these examples, I consider it very likely that the "square chamber of stone slabs about half a meter of diameter" in which the Bajaur scrolls were found was in fact a relic chamber, rather than some sort of storage compartment for old books as proposed by Strauch. It is true that one would not expect to find such a relic chamber "in one of the cell(s) of the monastery," as reported in Khan and Khan, but in view of the unreliable nature of the report, I am inclined to doubt this part of the description and to conclude that, *pace* Strauch, the Bajaur scrolls, like the other Gandhāran manuscripts, were ritually buried in the relic chamber of a *stūpa*, either loose or, as I suspect is more likely, in a clay pot or other container which has not been preserved, perhaps because it was broken in the course of an illicit excavation.

If this is correct, we can conclude that the four most important groups of Gandhāran manuscripts were all ritually interred in *stūpa*s or other funerary monuments. We can, moreover, be quite sure that this was a common practice, since we know of numerous other instances of the interment of Gandhāran manuscripts, although most of these have been destroyed, lost, or are otherwise currently unavailable for study (Salomon 1999: 59–65). Of the four surviving groups, at least one, the Senior manuscripts, was apparently written with the specific intention of being interred. The circumstances surrounding the interment of the other three collections, that is, British Library, Schøyen, and Bajaur, are more difficult to determine, especially in the absence of reliable documentation of the circumstances of their discovery. But it is likely that some, if not all of them, consisted of manuscripts which were worn out, fragmentary, or otherwise damaged before interment; in such cases, the intention may have been to accord a proper "funeral" to the "dead" texts, according to a custom

which, as mentioned above, is widely attested in many parts of the ancient and modern world.

In any case, it can be safely assumed that the manuscripts in question, regardless of their specific character or condition, were understood and treated as relics. The status of written representations of the words of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*) as dharma-relics (*dharma-śarīra*), functionally equivalent to bodily relics (*śarīra*) of the Buddha or other Buddhist venerables, is widely acknowledged in Buddhist tradition. Thus, the essential motivation for interring manuscripts is obvious; it was a form of relic dedication. What is less clear, however, is the specific intentions and understandings on the part of the donors or dedicators. Here, several possibilities—which I hasten to add, are not necessarily mutually exclusive—come to mind.

First of all, the interment of Buddhist manuscripts, that is, of *dharma-śarīra*, was doubtless in large part intended as a merit-making exercise, just like the dedication of bodily relics. This is most clearly the case for the Senior scrolls, which, according to all available indications, were written out, not to serve any practical purpose, but for the express purpose of being interred. This is suggested not only by the condition, arrangement, and disposition of the scrolls themselves, but also by the content and format of the inscription on the pot containing them, which follows the typical pattern of a relic dedication, including, most importantly in this context, a specification of the intended beneficiaries of the merit produced by the dedication: *matrapitra-puyae sarvasatvana pu(*ya)e*, "in honor of [his] mother and father [and] in honor of all beings."[17]

Secondly, in the case of each of the three other major deposits of Gandhāran manuscripts there is at least a possibility—though in none of them the certainty—that the deposits consisted not of new manuscripts specially prepared for ritual interment as in the Senior case, but rather of old manuscripts that had been replaced or discarded. Here too, no doubt, their interment would have been motivated in part at least by the desire to produce merit by dedicating a dharma-relic. However, another motive, albeit perhaps a secondary and concomitant one, may have been a custom requiring the ritual disposal of worn or damaged copies of the *buddhavacana*. As has already been conceded, this hypothesis is based on comparative evidence, namely, the prevalence of similar rules or customs in other cultures of the ancient and modern world, rather than on any direct or explicit evidence from the Buddhist tradition itself, and for this reason this explanation must remain hypothetical.

A third factor that may be relevant to the issue at hand is the apparent association of some textual relics with bodily relics. In a few cases, archaeological reports provide some indications, though unfortunately nothing like the sort of detailed documentation that we would hope to have, that human remains in the form of bone fragments and ash were sometimes contained within Gandhāran reliquaries together with of birch bark manuscripts (Salomon 1999: 78–80). In such cases, we may be dealing with funereal vessels containing the bodily remains of deceased monks who were interred together with their personal manuscripts, a practice which is well attested in later Tibetan tradition.

Fourth and finally, another possible motivation underlying the interment of Gandhāran manuscripts is what might be called "dharma insurance," that is, a desire to ensure that the dharma, in the form of *buddhavacana*, would survive into the far future. The danger of the decay and disappearance of the dharma was very much on the minds of Buddhists in ancient times, both in India and elsewhere, and we have well-attested instances from East and Southeast Asia of projects involving the inscription and interment of Buddhist scriptures in forms and situations intended to ensure their permanence. For example, in Japan from the eleventh century onward, copies of the *Lotus Sūtra* and other favored texts were frequently buried "in order to insure the survival of the teachings" (Tanabe 1988: 43), and over two thousand such *sūtra* burial sites are now known (Tokuno 2000). Similarly, at the Yúnjūsì (雲居寺) temple at Fangshan, near Beijing, some fifteen thousand stone slabs were inscribed with Buddhist texts and interred in order to ensure their survival after the imminent decline of the dharma. For the Indian world, the literary and archaeological testimony on this matter is, as usual, much sparser than for East Asia, and we once again have no explicit evidence that scripture burials were intended to function in this way. So here too, we can only suspect the existence this practice in India by way of retroactive extrapolation from later practices in other parts of the Buddhist world.

To sum up what we know so far: the ritual interment of manuscripts was definitely a common practice during the heyday of Gandhāran Buddhism in the early centuries of the Christian era, and the currently attested and reported instances of the practice undoubtedly represent some tiny fraction of the total number of manuscripts that were buried in antiquity. But as to which (if any) of the four more or less hypothetical motivations proposed above actually guided their interment, we can only guess, for lack of solid textual and archaeological data. For, while we do have in at least one case, namely the Senior pot, an inscription which seems to be directly associated with text interment, it contains no explicit statement of the motivations for the act other than the generic dedication of its merit to the donor's parents and to all living beings; this, in contrast to the situation in East Asia, where thousands of well-documented *sūtra* burial sites with detailed inscriptional records are known. Of course, it is not impossible that some day a more explicit declaration might turn up in a well-documented archaeological context in the Indian world, but it would be unwise to expect this. Unless and until this happens, we can only resort to hypothesis and extrapolation.

Despite these uncertainties, it is interesting to learn that the practice of text burial in general, so widely and clearly attested in Tibet and East Asia, is now shown to have also been common in ancient Gandhāra. Although the physical forms and visual manifestations of these early Gandhāran deposits are quite different from later *sūtra* burials in other parts of the Buddhist world, it is reasonable to suppose that the underlying theory and motivations were similar. So perhaps in this respect, as in so much of Buddhist tradition, there is a link between the traditions of Gandhāra and East Asia, and the Gandhāran text burials may well prefigure the later ones in East Asia. If this is correct, we can also look at the matter the other way round and read back, at least tentatively, the well-documented motivations of

later text burials in East Asia onto the older ones of Gandhāra. Since in the former a concern for the long-term preservation of the dharma stands out prominently, we may suspect that this was at least a part of the motivations of the Gandhāran Buddhists as well, despite the lack of direct testimony.[18]

Finally, I wish to clarify that I am not claiming that the practice of *sūtra* burial was original or unique to Gandhāra. Although this might seem to be the case based on the evidence we have, in all likelihood this is only due to the accidents of preservation. For, if the archaeological record of early Buddhism is spotty in Gandhāra, it is far more so in the Indian heartland, where, due to rigors of the monsoon climate, nothing at all survives of early manuscript material. Therefore, there is no reason to assume that scripture interment was uniquely Gandhāran, and in fact, this practice, like so much of Gandhāran Buddhism, probably had roots and predecessors in India proper. However, in this regard, as in regard to the early development of the Buddhist manuscript tradition itself, the Gandhāran phase provides us with the best evidence—indeed, virtually the only evidence—and this is almost certainly as far back as we will ever be able to go.

Appendix:

Summary of the four main Gandhāran manuscript collections

Table 2.1 Size of Economy by Selected Countries, 2002

Name of collection	*Location and estimated date*	*Contents*	*Condition*	*Container and accompanying inscription*	*References*
British Library Collection	Region of Haḍḍa, Afghanistan (?). Ca. first century AD	29 birch bark scrolls in Kharoṣṭhī script/Gāndhārī language. Diverse texts, genres, and scribal hands.	At least some of the scrolls were apparently in damaged condition before interment.	Found in a clay pot bearing a donative inscription recording the gift of the pot (not of the manuscripts) "to the Dharmaguptaka masters."	Allon 2001; Glass 2007; Lenz 2003; Salomon 1999, 2000, 2008.
Senior Collection	Region of Haḍḍa, Afghanistan (?). First half of second century AD	24 birch bark scrolls in Kharoṣṭhī/Gāndhārī. Coherent anthology of *sūtra* and *sūtra*-like texts, all or nearly all in the same hand.	The scrolls seem to have been new when interred, and may have been written specifically in order to be interred.	Found in a clay pot with a dedicatory inscription recording the establishment of the pot in a *stūpa*, but without explicit reference to its contents. The formulation of the inscription is typical of relic dedications.	Allon in progress; Glass 2007; Salomon 2003, 2008.
Schøyen Collection	Bamiyan, Afghanistan. Probably second to third or fourth centuries AD	127 substantial fragments plus several dozen miniscule fragments of palm leaf folios in Kharoṣṭhī/Gāndhārī. Early portion of a much larger collection, composed mostly of later texts in Brāhmī script/ Sanskrit language.	Scattered fragments of several folios of different manuscripts. Possibly discarded damaged leaves for which substitutes had been prepared and inserted into the original manuscript.	Not known; some fragments were reportedly found in a wooden box wrapped in a cloth inscribed with a *dhāraṇī* text.	Salomon and Allon 2001; Matsuda and Glass, forthcoming, Salomon, forthcoming.
Bajaur Collection	Reportedly found near Mian Kili, Bajaur Agency, Pakistan. First or second century AD	18 birch bark scrolls in Kharoṣṭhī/Gāndhārī. Diverse texts, genres, and scribal hands.	Variable, ranging from "very well preserved" to "heavily damaged" (Strauch 2007: 9–11).	Allegedly found in a square chamber constructed of stone slabs, presumably a relic chamber.	Khan and Khan 2004; Strauch 2007.

Notes

1 For a general survey of recent discoveries of Gandhāran and other Buddhist manuscripts, see Allon forthcoming.
2 Allon 2001, Allon and Salomon 2000, Glass 2007, Lenz 2003, Salomon 1998b, Salomon 2000, and Salomon 2008.
3 Allon 2007; Allon in progress; Salomon 1999; Strauch 2007.
4 On radiocarbon dates for Gandhāran manuscripts, see Allon, Salomon, Jacobsen, and Zoppi 2006.
5 For these, the reader is referred to the publications mentioned in notes 2 and 3 above.
6 For detailed discussions of this inscription and its significance, see Salomon 1999: 151–2 and 214–7.
7 The absence of the donor's name from the inscription in question is unusual but not unique (Salomon 1999: 214, 241).
8 For quotations, references, and evaluation of these findings and other related data, see Salomon 1999: 77–81.
9 Charles Masson's description of "[l]arge numbers of funereal jars … in a mound behind the village of Hidda, near Tappa Kelán …. deposited sometimes in regular succession … resting on a common line of cement" (in Wilson 1841: 112–3; cited in Salomon 1999: 78) seems to refer to a similar situation, but Tarzi's recent discussion provides us for the first time with a clear picture of the archaeological situation of such funereal vessels.
10 The designation "Senior" refers to the owner of the collection, Robert Senior.
11 For detailed descriptions of the contents of the Senior collection, see Salomon 2003, Allon 2007 and Allon in progress. Text editions of individual scrolls from the Senior collection are presented in Glass 2007 and Salomon 2008 (part III).
12 See the discussion of this problem in Allon 2007: 18–23.
13 The inscription is recorded both on the pot itself and again on the lid in an abbreviated fashion so it could fit on the smaller surface. The version presented here is the longer version on the pot. For details, see Salomon 2003: 74–8.
14 For a complete discussion of this date and its interpretation, see Salomon 2003: 76–8.
15 Since another manuscript of the Dharmapada in Gāndhārī is now available in the British Library collection (published in Lenz 2003: part I). The definitive edition and study of the Khotan Dharmapada is Brough 1962.
16 The inscription of Ramaka on a flat stone slab is also, as noted by Fussman (1980: 6), undoubtedly the cover slab of a similar rectangular relic chamber. For further examples of inscribed relic chamber cover slabs, see Salomon, forthcoming b.
17 It might be argued against this theory that if the Buddhists of ancient Gandhāra buried their scriptures in order to preserve them for the distant future, they would have used a more durable material than birch bark. However, regardless of what the Gandhārans might have thought about the matter, it is a fact that many of these scrolls have in fact survived for some two thousand years, well past the then-predicted lifespan of the Dharma. Therefore, if the Buddhists of ancient Gandhāra had intended these deposits to serve as lasting records of the words of the Buddha, their wishes can now be said to have been fulfilled by their recent rediscovery.

3 Materiality and merit in Sri Lankan Buddhist manuscripts

Stephen C. Berkwitz

The study of palm leaf manuscripts reveals two important facts about Buddhist literature from Sri Lanka. First, historical encounters with Buddhist texts were highly circumstantial affairs where finding manuscripts that were complete and consistent could hardly have been taken for granted. Second, the actual process of producing palm leaf manuscripts involved a great deal of physical labor and generated certain expectations about their value as material objects and their efficacy for realizing a variety of religious goals. However, when working with critical editions of canonical texts, it is often easy to forget that premodern Buddhists in Sri Lanka and other parts of Asia encountered texts that often took very different forms. This chapter will argue that surviving Sri Lankan manuscripts and manuscript collections offer critical insights into how materiality and merit functioned as key variables in reading and writing the Buddha's Dharma in premodern Sri Lanka.

A simple, but little-recognized fact about the interpretation of Buddhist texts is that the material embodiment of texts structures the way they are read and understood. The particular sociohistorical conditions in which Buddhist texts were written, transmitted, and read establish the parameters within which people understood and put them to use. Literary critic Jerome McGann has persuasively argued that interpreters of texts ought to adopt a kind of "materialist hermeneutics," whereby one considers not only the linguistic codes of semantic meaning but also the bibliographic codes of texts—including techniques of manuscript production, translation, textual dissemination, and the cultural values associated with writing, reading, and listening to texts (McGann 1991: 15–6). Phrased differently, McGann's work challenges scholars to consider the material production and form of texts as critically involved in the process of conveying meaning.

The concrete embodiment of Buddhist texts in manuscript form not only contributed to the meanings of texts, but it was also the chief means employed to preserve the Buddha's Dharma. The idea of preservation was also the reason given by Sri Lankans for their efforts to put the oral teachings of the Buddha into writing, possibly for the first time in history.[1] This is said to have occurred some time between 29 and 17 BCE at the Alu Vihare monastery outside of Matale

"for the sake of the longevity of the Dhamma."[2] Contrary to the account in the *Mahāvaṃsa* that states the Tipiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakathā were put into writing then and there, most scholars affirm that the process of writing down and standardizing the Pāli Canon took several centuries. But the concern over the disappearance of the Buddha's Teaching seems to have been real enough, for, in the first century BCE, Sri Lanka witnessed a powerful rebellion, a twelve-year famine and the formation of a rival monastic fraternity (i.e., Abhayagiri-vihāra), all of which contributed to the efforts of some monks to preserve the Dharma in written form (Adikaram 1994: 79).

There is, however, another side to viewing Buddhist manuscripts in terms of preservation. For, manuscripts, both as individual texts and as collections, *preserve* for us some sense of how people in earlier centuries encountered and read Buddhist texts. The use of palm leaf manuscripts in Sri Lanka undercut the authority of a single or original work since nearly all palm leaf texts had limited life spans and eventually perished under the island's humid conditions and the assaults of rodents and leaf-eating insects. As a result, the author's original text soon gave way to hand-copied versions in which alterations, omissions, and interpolations would develop, particularly in para-canonical works attributed to authors other than the Buddha himself. The lack of stability in most premodern texts leads McGann rightly to affirm that variation was the invariant rule of the textual condition before print technology could quickly produce numerous identical texts (McGann 1991: 185). In such manuscript cultures, where priority was given to the continuance of a text and the constant renegotiation of its words and meaning, the acts of reading and interpretation were profoundly affected by the materiality of texts (Bryan 1999: 45–6).

Manuscript production in Sri Lankan history

The history of textual production in Sri Lanka preserved and transformed the Dharma through acts of production, translation, commentary, anthologizing, and recitation. In the fifth century, Buddhaghosa began the process of translating and editing the old Sinhala commentarial literature into Pāli language commentaries—a process picked up by other monks in subsequent centuries. The conservative, text-centered ethos of the ancient Mahāvihāra monastic lineage that came to define and to dominate Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism used written manuscripts both to preserve the Dharma and to authorize their lineage of monks who possess and practice the Buddha's teachings (Collins 1981: 102).

This led to an impressive collection of written works, many of which were held at renowned monastic libraries that attracted monastic pilgrims from other countries. Some of these same texts were conveyed by monks to and from other lands, particularly those in Southeast Asia. This body of literature was represented in rather mythic and symbolic terms as the written record of the Buddha's Word (*buddhavacana*), a complete rendering of universal truth and knowledge on palm leaves. This so-called "canon" of Buddhist scriptures was purportedly memorized and compiled by particularly virtuous and able monks. The *Samantapāsādikā*,

the commentary on the Vinaya, speaks to this comprehensive vision of ancient Pāli texts:

> Thus, the assembly of disciplined monks with Mahākassapa at the fore rehearsed this Word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*), which is singular and complete in terms of sentiment, and which is divided, for example, in a twofold manner such as the Dhamma and the Vinaya, having fixed its arrangement as 'This is the Dhamma and this is the Vinaya; these are the beginning, the middle, and the last sayings of the Buddha; this is the Vinaya basket, this is the Sutta basket, and this is the Abhidhamma basket; this is the Long Collection of Discourses up through the Short Collection of Discourses; and these are the nine kinds of texts starting with *sutta*s; and these are the 84,000 sections of the Dhamma.
>
> (Jayawickrama 1986: 156)

This commentarial claim depicts the sum total of the Buddha's Word as having been recited and fixed by his disciples at the supposed First Council of Rājagaha shortly after the Buddha's death. The presumed coherence of these canonical works implies they always existed as a complete and standardized set of scriptures. Indeed, it is said that the canonical texts were learned and passed down in their entirety by the venerable *arahant* Mahinda in Sri Lanka, thus apparently sustaining an unbroken lineage of Theravāda monks and scripture originating with the Buddha himself (Jayawickrama 1986: 54–5). As such, given the presumed authority of their origin and stability of their transmission, it conveniently follows that Sri Lankan Buddhist texts would generate stable, prima facie interpretations for all those who are trained to read them. It is this mythic idea of a coherent and authoritative Pāli Canon that has consequently shaped the way scholars have read and valued Theravāda literature.

However, this idealized representation of Buddhist literature presumes that the major problem facing these texts was one of preservation, not interpretation. The ideology of a closed canon that has been assiduously copied and transmitted allows one to dismiss the possibility that a single text could exist and be read in various ways. The scholarly use of Pāli canonical texts from Sri Lanka could thus become simply a matter of translating and interpreting a select number of foundational texts. However, this stance effectively overlooks the historical and material embeddedness of the texts themselves. It also makes it possible for scholars to ignore the vast amounts of Buddhist writing in the literary dialects of the vernacular Sinhala language. Aside from the Pāli canonical and commentarial works, other Pāli works related to history writing, devotional expressions, and linguistic studies emerged throughout the first millennium of the Common Era and thereafter in Sri Lanka. Around the ninth century CE, however, monks and lay scholars began to compose texts in a literary dialect of the Sinhala language, a process that gained steam and eventually surpassed the composition of Pāli works beginning around the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Malalasekera 1994: 235; Berkwitz 2004: 84–7, 106–17).

Because of this vibrant literary activity, Sri Lanka became an important repository for Buddhist manuscripts in Pāli and Sinhala. Many of these texts, along with images and relics brought by monks, were instrumental in transplanting a Sri Lankan monastic lineage into peninsular Southeast Asia, eventually leading to the establishment of what is later called "Theravāda" and the cross-fertilization of textual and monastic traditions across the Indian Ocean. Assumptions about the coherence and completeness of Theravāda literature were transmitted along with the texts themselves, thus generating a universalist ideal to compete with the particularistic realities of manuscript texts that were often incomplete and subject to variation. Although Buddhist texts were frequently imagined to contain timeless and invariable truths that had been taught by the Buddha and his followers, the impermanent and variable physical forms of manuscripts could directly challenge such assumptions.

The relatively young age of extant Sri Lankan manuscripts, most dating back no further than the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reminds us that Sri Lankan Buddhists throughout history relied on texts that had been copied and recopied frequently.[3] The development of a specialized craft to produce palm leaf manuscripts has been ably described in detail elsewhere,[4] so suffice it to say here that scribes used a metal stylus to etch words onto processed strips of palm leaves from the Talipot or Palmyra trees, which were then blackened with a mixture of resin oil and charcoal. After drying, the excess black coloring was wiped off, leaving a leaf with legible writing where letters had been inscribed. Leaves were written on both sides and strung together through two holes punched in them and protected by two wooden covers . This technique was carried up to the twentieth century but is rarely found in Sri Lanka today.[5]

In addition to the harm caused to dried palm leaves by climate and pests, there are other historical factors that make finding Sri Lankan manuscripts written before the eighteenth century unlikely. One factor is the effect of the Portuguese occupation of the island's lowlands during the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries. Eager to convert the natives to Catholicism and increasingly drawn into rivalries between the island's regional kings, the Portuguese resorted to a policy of suppressing Buddhism and the opponents of their Church and army. The Portuguese destruction of monastic colleges and temple libraries throughout the south led to the destruction of many native writings as well (Godakumbura 1980: XXXIV). In addition, the reputed conversion of King Rajasinghe to Śaivism in the late 1580s led this implacable foe of the Portuguese to likewise destroy Buddhist books in the lowland regions still under Sinhala rule.[6] The effects of colonial interventions in Sri Lanka meant that manuscripts were relatively scarce and that there was an absence of monks who had undergone higher ordination (*upasampadā*) in the first decades of the eighteenth century. When Ven. Välivița Saraṇaṃkara founded a reformed monastic lineage called the Siyam Nikāya in 1753, he prioritized monastic education with the requisite study and copying of manuscripts to revive the Sangha and to distinguish his community of monks, much like the earlier Mahāvihāra monks. (Blackburn 2001: 46–51). Many of the oldest extant Sri Lankan manuscripts date from this period.

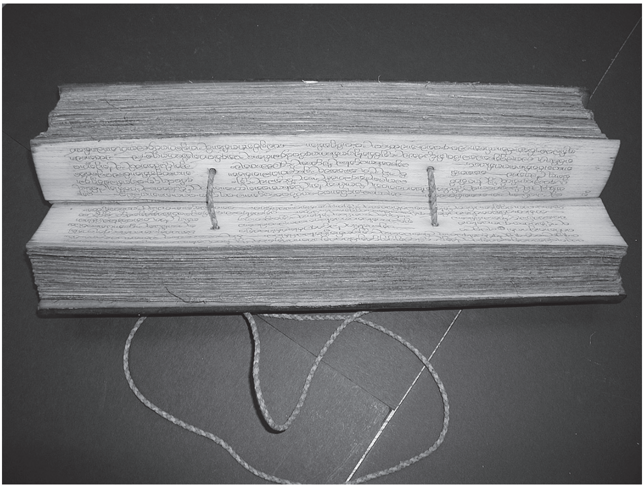


Figure 3.1 Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscript (#3544) from the Guardian of the Flame Sri Lankan Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Arizona State University Libraries. (Photograph by Robert Spindler, courtesy of Arizona Board of Regents for Arizona State University.)

Textual contingencies

Taken together, the bibliographical codes of physical manuscripts and the historical and climactic conditions affecting their preservation served to make reading and learning from Buddhist texts in premodern Sri Lanka a highly circumstantial practice. Scholars today are the beneficiaries of two centuries of research, editing, translation, and printing of Buddhist texts. Critical editions of important Buddhist texts abound, and research libraries can be expected to have complete collections of canonical works. However, by looking at manuscripts and manuscript collections, we may dispel the common, often implicit, scholarly presumption about the overwhelming primacy of canonical texts in Theravāda Buddhism. Specifically, manuscripts offer a view of Buddhist literature that was more fluid and variable than what is normally allowed by the accepted view of a coherent and complete canon of Pāli texts at the center of Theravāda life.

It is in fact difficult to imagine that many temples aside from the largest of monasteries and educational centers (*pirivena*) would have ever possessed the complete Pāli Canon in manuscript form. Moreover, there is every reason to think that texts could go missing and folios could be removed without being reinserted. The frequency with which one finds missing folios in Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts today speaks to what must have been a common occurrence—a reader removes leaves from the manuscript and then loses them, reinserts them incorrectly, or neglects to put them back. Manuscript collections, moreover, illustrate the bilingual or even multilingual nature of premodern Sri Lankan Buddhism.

Some texts are preserved in Pāli, while many others are composed in Sinhala, and less frequently Sanskrit and even Tamil. Some manuscripts, likely gifts from visiting monks or dignitaries, were written in Southeast Asian scripts such as Burmese, Khmer, or Thai.

Indeed since it is entirely possible that complete collections of the Pāli Tipiṭaka were uncommonly found in monastic libraries and since manuscript versions of canonical texts could be incomplete or missing, we can presume that readers often had to resort to commentaries and translations as substitutes for the original texts. Also, given the unwieldy size and nature of certain canonical texts like the *Vinaya*, Buddhists apparently often chose to consult the diverse numbers of summaries and compendiums composed by later scholars in place of the longer (and denser) original texts that may have still been available (Hallisey 1990a: 206–7). And thus while the *idea* of a complete and fixed canon of Buddhist texts may have been important for the self-definition of a universalist Theravāda orthodoxy, as Steven Collins rightly points out (Collins 1981: 102–4), the contingent and varied nature of manuscript holdings in any given library suggests that people's access to texts and their subsequent interpretations of the Dharma would have been much more particular and locally determined.

In this sense, modern collections of Sri Lankan Buddhist manuscripts supply much of the basis for developing a materialist hermeneutics toward Theravāda texts. Although today Sri Lankans often see manuscripts as less practical than printed editions, they still typically treat them with care and respect as the material instantiations of the Buddha's Dharma. Nevertheless, most of the extant Sri Lankan Buddhist manuscripts in temple libraries are un-catalogued, neglected, and even sometimes broken up and sold. Up till now, there have been few attempts to catalogue and preserve these manuscripts on a wide scale, despite calls to do so (Liyanaratne 1989: 125–7).[7] In the 1950s and 60s, K. D. Somadasa conducted a large-scale survey of manuscripts in temples around the island.[8] While still valuable, this list of manuscript titles is woefully outdated, and many titles that appear therein may no longer be found at the libraries indicated. The Colombo Museum Library has an impressive collection of over 2400 manuscripts, as well as a helpful catalogue. The University of Peradeniya Library also has a large collection, but it lacks a published catalogue. Outside of Sri Lanka, the Hugh Nevill Collection of Sinhalese Manuscripts at the British Library exists as a well-catalogued, well-preserved collection of 2227 works that the civil servant collected or had had copied between 1865 and 1897 in Ceylon.[9] There are also significant, but smaller collections of Sri Lankan manuscripts at the Royal Library in Copenhagen and the National Library in Paris (see Godakumbura 1980; Liyanaratne 1983).

Many of these manuscript collections reflect another phenomenon that complicates attempts to reconstruct which texts premodern temple libraries actually held. Specifically, most modern collections were assembled in a somewhat artificial and ad hoc manner. The titles they contain cannot always be assumed to reflect the educational needs and literary preferences of specific communities at a given time and place.[10] Instead they tend to reflect a desire to preserve whatever

manuscript could be obtained. At the same time, however, it is not unreasonable to expect that premodern monastic librarians exhibited a similar attitude in their attempts to collect and store Buddhist manuscripts. Many catalogues reveal that the presence of multiple manuscript editions of a single text was fairly common, a fact that may illustrate both their relative popularity and chance acquisitions. The manners in which certain titles were circulated and transmitted remain poorly understood, but it seems highly unlikely that texts always moved about in rational and predictable ways. Given the possibilities for loss, damage, and theft, one's ability to locate a given manuscript, complete and intact, could rarely have been assured.

The Guardian of the Flame Collection

The recent emergence of a previously unknown collection of Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts, known by the name of the "Guardian of the Flame," can serve as a case study for using manuscripts as sources of knowledge about the forms and uses of Buddhist texts in premodern Sri Lanka. As a private collection that has been donated in part to the Arizona State University Library, the Guardian of the Flame Collection constitutes a significant find for scholars of Theravāda Buddhism and Buddhist manuscripts in general.[11] This collection contains over 500 manuscripts, easily making it the largest known collection of Sri Lankan manuscripts in the western hemisphere. Based on an examination of the preliminary catalog prepared for the Guardian of the Flame Collection, one notes that there is a relatively high proportion of Pāli texts and multiple copies of many works.[12] These facts may suggest that a large portion of the collection was originally obtained from one or more Buddhist *pirivena*s, although the exact provenance of all the titles remains unknown.

In addition to some canonical texts, there are numerous commentaries and subcommentaries, *paritta* (protective verses) texts, and many other miscellaneous Pāli works such as grammatical and lexicographical texts. The number of Sinhala works is still substantial, and the collection contains numerous *baṇapot* (or preaching texts), *sannaya* (or Sinhala translations interspersed with exegetical matter), *gäṭapada* (glossaries), and *parikathā* (or exegetical commentaries) in literary Sinhala. Works of classical Sinhala verse (*kavi*), popular but fairly removed from monastic curricula, have yet to be found. Moreover, there are a number of texts that have not been identified, largely due to missing, damaged, or unfinished leaves. Some texts appear to be astrological or medicinal texts. The collection also includes a handful of Tamil and Sanskrit works and at least one text written in Burmese script.

Although this collection may be the result of some unique efforts made to assemble whatever palm leaf manuscripts were available, its varied titles comprising different languages and textual genres—in various degrees of completion and preservation—was surely the rule of thumb when it came to collecting and consulting Buddhist manuscripts in premodern Sri Lanka. The Orientalist heritage of Buddhist Studies encourages scholars to value and focus on canonical works

in classical languages. However, the Guardian of the Flame and other collections of Sri Lankan manuscripts usually reveal that canonical works were frequently outnumbered by commentaries, glossaries, translations, and preaching texts. Moreover, the fact that relatively few of these latter texts have been critically edited or translated into western languages must surely result in a rather distorted vision of the Buddhist literature actually used in Theravāda communities.

Recent calls to examine the "practical canons" of Theravāda Buddhism—particularly its pedagogical and vernacular texts—are helpful reminders that the literary world of premodern Buddhists often looked quite different from the modern world of print technologies and the Pāli Text Society (Blackburn 1999: 282–5; cf. Hansen 2003: 813–7). The works actually read and used appears to have been more varied not only in terms of their titles, but also in terms of their linguistic contents and physical condition. Indeed, even the designation of "practical canons" may be an overstatement, since it implies more design and a greater standardization of texts held in individual libraries than the often-circumstantial nature of manuscript collections in Sri Lanka would usually permit. However, since there are relatively few, well-catalogued collections of Sri Lankan manuscripts of comparable size, the Guardian of the Flame Collection offers some insights into how Buddhist texts were copied, circulated, and preserved. In other words, it enables us to speculate on the transmission histories of premodern Buddhist texts in order to learn more about how texts were read and interpreted, and how they in turn gave rise to other sorts of texts.[13]

In the Guardian of the Flame Collection, commentaries and subcommentaries are often more numerous than canonical texts, and there appears to be no copies of the *Itivuttaka, Buddhavaṃsa*, and *Cariyāpiṭaka* from the Pāli Canon. There are a large number of copies of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, an important work on meditation, and numerous copies of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the compendium on monastic discipline called *Vinayavinicchaya*, and the Sinhala prose work called *Pūjāvaliya.* The multiple manuscripts of these titles speak of their importance in Sri Lankan monastic culture. The collection has a large number of Sinhala *sannaya*s or translations of Pāli Suttas, including rare editions of the *Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta* and *Kāḷākārāma Sutta*. One also finds several scarce commentaries and subcommentaries, including the *Ekakkharakosa-vaṇṇana (ṭīkā)*, *Rasavāhinī-ṭīkā*, *Rūpasiddhi-ṭīkā*, the *Vajirabuddhi-ṭīkā* on *Samantapāsādikā*, and the *Vinayatthamañjusā* or subcommentary on the *Kaṅkhāvitaranī.* There are also a number of other hard-to-find works that are practically unknown to scholars today. These include the *Kudusikha-padārtha*, a glossary for a work summarizing certain rules of the Vinaya, the *Sīmāsaṅkara-vinodanī*, which is a work on the boundaries for ordination ceremonies, and a possible copy of the *Vimukti-saṃgraha* on methods of meditation.

Generally speaking, what one finds when examining the preliminary catalogue for the Guardian of the Flame Collection is a host of Buddhist works in need of both preservation and study. Because of their relatively recent age, Sri Lankan manuscripts lack the historical significance of ancient manuscripts found in other, dryer parts of Asia. However, these texts are still significant as

remnants of the broad diversity of Buddhist writing that characterizes the literary heritage of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The collection affords a glimpse at the numerous genres that informed Buddhist knowledge and practice. The diversity of texts in circulation as palm leaf manuscripts and the variations seen from one collection to another suggests a degree of arbitrariness to the texts held at any given location. Some texts like the *Dhammapada* were likely widespread, but many others may have only been infrequently encountered and consulted. Thus, the often ad hoc quality of palm leaf manuscripts wherein several seemingly unrelated texts were bound together may also have resulted in a kind of ad hoc knowledge about the Dharma where, beyond the requisite texts in the monastic curricula, people would have resorted to whatever works were at hand.

Blessings, benefits, and aspirations

While Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts inevitably gave rise to contingent and circumstantial readings based upon the unique characteristics of any given text, they also often contain revealing evidence about the religious imagination and aspirations of their writers. Authors and scribes alike routinely inserted particular words and declarations at the beginning and end of their works. In most cases, the invocatory and benedictory statements of scribes who copied texts are left out of modern printed editions. The aspirations of the original author are usually included, but these are often seen as "paratextual" (like, for example, the "Acknowledgements" page) and relatively insignificant next to the work itself.[14] However, this abstract view of a Buddhist text overlooks the fact that manuscripts usually contain important signs of how writers viewed themselves and valued their works. Even a cursory glance at Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts reveals that various blessings, affirmations of benefits, and aspirations for one's future existence were extremely common.[15] Such written remarks point to why people undertook the difficult tasks of writing and copying texts in the first place.

Written remarks invoking blessings and good fortune or dedicating an act of merit towards a higher religious goal typically appear at the beginning and at the end of a Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscript. The particular combinations of words and ideas are theoretically limitless, but an examination of different manuscripts shows that there are certain conventions that often act as a restraint on the variety of statements that are found. There are, roughly speaking, three types of paratextual utterances found in Sri Lankan manuscripts: 1) blessings (*āsīrvāda*), 2) affirmations about the benefits associated with Buddhist texts (*dharmānisaṃsa*), and 3) aspirations (*prārthanā*). While words of blessings are often short and impersonal, aspirations are distinct since they are often longer and express individual aims at the conclusion of the text. Both kinds of writing are exceedingly common, if at times formulaic. The *dharmānisaṃsa* may almost be considered as separate texts since they can be quite lengthy and may appear before or after the main work itself. However, since they deal with the benefits that are alleged to come with reading

or listening to a Buddhist text, they have an implied relation to the text or texts with which it is bound.

The appearance of *āsīrvāda, dharmānisaṃsa,* and *prārthanā* in palm leaf manuscripts demonstrate that acts of writing were conceived as significant religious acts that could give rise to beneficial results for the writers, readers, and listeners of texts (Berkwitz 2004: 193–4).[16] As such, Buddhist manuscripts were produced and read not only for developing greater wisdom. The production and transmission of these texts were also thought to be meritorious deeds through which certain desired ends could be accomplished. At the same time, moreover, writing a text came to be seen as a method by which one could transform oneself into a more virtuous and fortunate being. Writing remarks invoking good fortune, aspiring for felicitous goals, and proclaiming the fruits of writing or listening to texts helped to fashion particular kinds of Buddhist devotees—persons whose engagements with manuscripts were taken to be morally and even physically transformative.

Significantly, the paratextual remarks found in Sri Lankan manuscripts often appear highly conventional and formulaic. Certain words and statements can appear in different manuscript editions and titles with considerable regularity, despite the lack of specific guidelines for copying manuscripts in Sri Lanka. Scribes typically added words invoking blessings at the beginning and at the end of their works. One convention finds the words *svasti siddham*, or "May there be blessings and fulfillment," written on the left side of the first leaf of a manuscript. This act represents the making of a resolution to ensure that one's labor in copying a manuscript will reach fruition. In addition, at the end of most palm leaf manuscripts, one finds one or a series of blessings with words such as: *siddhirastu* ("May there be success"), *subhamastu* ("May there be happiness"), *ārogyamastu* ("May there be health"), and sometimes *kalyānamastu* ("May there be good fortune"). These words, phrased in Sanskrit to denote the expressive power assumed to inhere in them, evince the scribe's desired outcomes from having finished copying a Buddhist text.[17] However, since these blessings are unrestricted, it is even possible for a reader to resolve to attain the same blessings after having read through the manuscript.

Another form of *āsīrvāda* at the beginning of Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts is the inclusion of one or more Pāli verses (*gāthā*s) after the initial *namaskāra*, or words of reverence dedicated to the Buddha.[18] My research into more than two-dozen manuscript versions of the Pāli and Sinhala *Thūpavaṃsa*s revealed that scribes often wrote one or two *gāthās*, wholly unrelated to the main text, on the first leaf of a manuscript (Berkwitz 2004: 200–14). One verse is the well-known excerpt from the *Dhammapada*: "Refraining from all that is unwholesome, the cultivation of the wholesome, the purification of one's mind, this is the instruction of the Buddhas" (cf. Hinüber and Norman 1995: v. 183). This particular verse, which is taken by many Sri Lankans as a summary statement of the entire Dharma, is also traditionally attributed with protective powers for those who chant it. The inclusion of this verse in manuscripts signifies the scribe's expectation that it would be conducive to accomplishing the task of copying a text completely and correctly (Berkwitz 2004: 212–3).

Another Pāli verse from the *Dhammapada* that is sometimes inserted at the beginning of a manuscript reads: "The gift of Dhamma prevails over all gifts, the taste of Dhamma prevails over all tastes, the attachment to Dhamma prevails over all attachments, the destruction of craving prevails over all forms of suffering" (cf. Hinüber and Norman 1995: v. 354). This verse has also been singled out for its importance in the tradition. Short commentaries were written on its meaning and preserved in palm leaf texts (Somadasa 1989: 138, 260, 279). Both the *sabbapāpassa* and the *sabbadānaṃ* verses mentioned above represent means for the scribe to draw upon the protective power of true speech once uttered by the Buddha himself. As such, this scribal convention mimics the practice of *paritta* chanting, whereby the ritualized chanting of Pāli verses is held to possess miraculous and protective powers when recited with sincerity and devotion (De Silva 1981: 139).

Related to the *āsīrvāda* in manuscripts are the longer *dharmānisaṃsa* that often go into great detail about how writing, reading, and listening to works of the Dharma generate great blessings. These generic discourses on the benefits of listening to sermons and of writing down religious texts typically cite a story that illustrates how a particular person or deity achieved a certain beneficial result from engaging the Dharma (Somadasa 1987: 10). Such benefits may include the immediate attainment of the awakened state of arahantship—an assertion that indicates something about the transformative power of the Buddha's teachings. Elsewhere, another Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscript quotes from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* to highlight the five benefits of hearing the Dharma:

> Monks, there are five benefits in hearing the Dhamma. What are the five? One hears what hasn't been heard. One purifies what has been heard. One overcomes doubt. One straightens out one's views. And one gladdens one's mind. Indeed these, o' monks, are the five benefits in hearing the Dhamma.
> (Somadasa 1989: 84–5; cf. Hardy 1994: 248)

Interestingly, this *dharmānisaṃsa* that concludes with a canonical pronouncement on the benefits of hearing the Dharma was bound with a collection of noncanonical Sinhala and Pāli texts, a fact that illustrates an expansive vision of Dharma wherein benefits may also accrue from listening to Sinhala and Pāli works composed by authors other than the Buddha.

Short *dharmānisaṃsa* texts that confirm the benefits associated with writing or listening to the Dharma appear frequently in manuscript anthologies. By narrating the good results experienced by people who engaged the Buddha's teachings in the past, these texts explicitly recognize the value of producing and using manuscripts. Phrased differently, the *dharmānisaṃsa* texts celebrate the efforts of those who write, read, and listen to texts, providing a clear rationale for engaging in all kinds of textual activity. As the material instantiations of the Dharma, Buddhist palm leaf manuscripts were traditionally bestowed with great value and reverence in Sri Lanka. The practical benefits that the *dharmānisaṃsa* works associated with particular manuscripts enhanced the symbolic value and authority attributed to

all books on the Dharma. They showed how much there was to gain by writing and listening to such texts. In addition, they endowed all literary activity with religious significance, sustaining the efforts toward producing and transmitting Buddhist texts.

Aspirations, or *prārthanā*, are distinctive from other forms of manuscript writing in that they express a specific goal or a number of goals that a person seeks to achieve for helping to bring another work of Dharma into the world. Their usual appearance at the end of texts is significant, since it is customary in Sri Lanka for any act of merit to be concluded with an aspiration that dedicates the merit earned to a particular goal for a future life (Karunatillake 1979: 23). The writing of one or more *prārthanā* at the end of a text conspicuously transforms the act of writing a manuscript into an act of merit for the scribe and anyone who has arranged for its writing such as a patron. In this way, writing a Buddhist text is the equivalent of preaching the Dharma, and both are thought capable of yielding considerable karmic fruits. Many of the *prārthanā* that appear at the end of Sri Lankan manuscripts reflect the conventional expressions of Buddhists seeking fortunate rebirths and higher religious attainments. One such aspiration in the form of a Sinhala verse reads: "Having obtained merit from writing this, experiencing comfort and happiness without end, not proceeding through the fearful round of rebirth, may I become a world-transcending Buddha" (Berkwitz 2004: 196). In this instance, a scribe connects the act of writing with the eventual attainment of good fortune for oneself and others, since a Buddha by definition helps other beings attain nirvana too.

By inserting various *prārthanā* into their texts, scribes brought the accomplishment of diverse religious goals and an enhanced self-understanding within their grasp. Whether their goal was to see the future Buddha Maitreya, to be reborn in a heavenly existence, to be like a "wish-fulfilling tree" to all beings, or to be always handsome, wise, and generous in each rebirth, scribes invested their acts of writing with the desire and expectation of a radical transformation of their existence (Berkwitz 2004: 205–11).[19] Their act of merit in creating a Buddhist manuscript bestowed them with the subjective understanding of being someone who stands to receive good fortune in the future. This sense of righteousness and accomplishment could lead some scribes to write: "By virtue of this [act of writing], may I come to be in every existence having generosity and the memory of past births, endowed with the virtue of pious conviction, [endowed] with wealth, beauty, and a good family, and may I become a Buddha in the future" (Berkwitz 2004: 210).[20] The merit earned from writing a manuscript was thus understood to be vast enough to allow for aspirations as great as attaining Buddhahood.

Significantly, there is more attention given to the potential results of producing palm leaf manuscripts than there is to the actual process of making them. Sri Lankan scribes almost never describe their own writing practices, and only a clear minority of extant manuscripts mentions the names of those who composed them. Instead, scribes simply emphasized the good results of their activities, articulating certain hopes and expectations in fairly conventional aspirations. The stereotypical nature

of *prārthanā* is seen in the considerable number of palm leaf manuscripts that contain similar aspirations. Rather than finding highly personal expressions of a particular scribe's wishes, one instead finds a discrete number of formalized *prārthanā* chosen for inclusion by the scribes themselves (Berkwitz 2004: 204). Signs of creativity or originality appear not in the aspirations themselves, but rather in the selection of which aspirations to include in one's text. The people charged with producing new manuscripts to replace an older, worn-out copy or to fulfill a need for multiple copies of a single work typically copied some, but not all, of the aspirations written earlier in other manuscripts. In doing so, their subjectivity and religious imagination became patterned after those of other scribes, and they were led to adopt the identities and goals that other people wrote about. Colophon aspirations could make claims upon authors, scribes, and readers like other forms of literary texts, working to determine the conduct of individuals and making them submit to the ends that texts bestowed upon them (Hallisey 2003: 714).

When seen from this perspective, writing *prārthanā* becomes an exercise in the fashioning of one's will and the adoption of values articulated by other writers. Palm leaf manuscripts contain evidence that the labor that went into producing them was capable of transforming the ways writers thought and wrote about themselves. The transformative power of the Buddha's Dharma was, in theory, mirrored by the power that the practice of writing had over the scribes themselves. The production of a palm leaf manuscript was depicted as an act that can intervene and transform the course of one's life in the next world. Some scribes wrote of their desired futures: "By the merit of having written this [book], approaching [the future Buddha] Metteya and being established in the Refuges, may I be established in his Dispensation [in the future]" (Berkwitz 2004: 206). Other scribes envisioned that their acts of writing would effect their own moral and physical perfection:

> May I realize Enlightenment, which is the wish of noble beings, and up to the point of reaching the Seat of Enlightenment, let there always be for me birth in a pure lineage, the wisdom, piety, and longevity of Brahmā, the strength of ten elephants, the glory of Vajrakāya, the fame of King Aśoka, the wealth of Kuvera, the formal beauty of Kāmadeva, and generosity akin to Vessantara.
> (Berkwitz 2004: 211)

The writing of a palm leaf manuscript was thus seen as an opportunity to embody the virtues of other great beings. It made it possible for scribes and even readers to conceive and seek felicities that might otherwise seem impossible to attain. In addition, the aspirations they wrote and read endowed the manuscripts they encountered and produced with the status of valuable and powerful objects capable of transforming their lives with good fortune. In other words, palm leaf manuscripts were traditionally held not only to be repositories of religious knowledge, but they were also taken as discrete and tangible acts of merit.

Conclusion

Our survey of issues arising from Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts illustrates that the materiality of Buddhist texts influenced which texts were read and how they were understood. Before the nineteenth century, the textual world in Sri Lanka was one marked by contingency and convention. Extant palm leaf manuscript collections reveal to us a world where texts were often imperfectly copied, translated, excerpted, glossed, anthologized, summarized, broken apart, and lost. At the same time, they reveal much about the value attributed to the transformative power of writing, reading, and listening to religious texts. The very instability and variability of palm leaf manuscripts likely meant that what passed for Buddhist knowledge was neither uniform nor fixed. Their material flaws did not detract from their capacity to help people imagine, seek, and perhaps even attain higher religious goals.

Buddhist texts in manuscript form existed as empirical and social phenomena, the meanings of which were always established in highly particular cases and settings (McGann 1991: 177). Thus, to examine Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts is to gain invaluable cultural and historical insights into how texts were read and why texts were written—details critical for a more comprehensive understanding of Buddhist literature. If we as scholars are prepared to concede that the material forms of texts had a decisive impact on how people read and understood them, then any study of Buddhist literature that ignores manuscripts and manuscript cultures will be deficient. Manuscripts embody and express the values of wisdom and discipline that the writers of texts sought to inculcate in others and in themselves, particularly when it came to ideas about the meritorious effects of propagating the Dharma. Although most Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts are less than three hundred years old, they help preserve not only the great variety of literature in Theravāda Buddhism, but also reveal that the historical conditions of Buddhist knowledge were always contingent and pragmatic.

Notes

1 The recent discovery of Gāndhārī birch bark manuscripts from as early as the first century CE complicates the claim that Buddhist texts were first put into writing in Sri Lanka (cf. Salomon 2006: 356–7).
2 "Great, wise monks in the past, conveyed/The text of the Three Baskets and its Commentaries orally. / Having observed the decreasing numbers of beings, the monks who assembled/ wrote them down in books for the sake of the longevity of the Dhamma" (Buddhadatta 1959: chapt. XXXIII, vv. 102–3).
3 The two oldest, extant manuscripts in Sri Lanka today—a copy of *Pūjāvaliya* and a copy of the Pāli *Cullavagga*—appear to date from around the thirteenth century. See Kulasuriya (1990: 185); and W.A. de Silva (1938: xxviii–ix).
4 For instance, see W.A. de Silva, (1938: xiii–xv). See also Gunawardana (1997: 33–40) and Godakumbura (1980: il–l).
5 Bindu Urugodawatte has informed me of a village by the name of Maha Arachchimulla, which is along the Alawwa-Narammala Road between the international airport and Kurunegala, where palm leaf books continue to be made today. A recent newspaper

report also mentions palm leaf texts being produced by monks at the Kurunegala Moragollāva Nāgala Rajamahāvihāra.

6 Although hardly irrefutable, an account of Rajasinghe I's persecution of Buddhism and destruction of Buddhist texts appears in a later extension of the *Mahāvaṃsa*. See Geiger (1953: 225–6).

7 An effort originally funded by the Ford Foundation for the National Archives of Sri Lanka to preserve palm-leaf manuscripts in microfilm has yielded little fruit, and the texts that were microfilmed are exceedingly difficult to read.

8 This resulted in the publication, in two parts, of K.D. Somadasa, *Laṅkāvē Puskoḷa Pot Nāmāvaliya*.

9 K.D. Somadasa. *Catalogue of the Hugh Nevill Collection of Sinhalese Manuscripts in the British Library*, vols. 1–7. See vol. 1, vii for historical details on the collection.

10 In contrast, Anne M. Blackburn's study of some select manuscript collections in Kandy reflects her attempt to arrive at an historical understanding of precisely which texts were used at specific temples (Blackburn 2002).

11 The recent donations of the numerous manuscripts in the Guardian of the Flame Collection to Arizona State University (ASU) constitutes a significant and generous gift that stands to energize new research on Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts in the West.

12 The preliminary catalogue for the Guardian of the Flame Collection was prepared largely by Wijitha Bandara and the present author, who worked independently of each other but cooperated on trying to identify as many of the manuscripts as possible. A final catalogue, where the details of each work are completed and its identity is verified, will likely take several more years to prepare and publish.

13 Cf. the comments on researching transmission histories in Beer (1997: 8–10).

14 I use the term "paratextual" in the manner that Umberto Eco, following Gerard Genette, speaks of the whole series of messages that accompany and help explain a given text, but which lie outside the main text as such (Eco 1994: 19).

15 Anne M. Blackburn argues that *dharmānisaṃsa* texts increased in popularity during around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Sri Lanka (Blackburn 2001: 71, 172). Although this is certainly possible, it also is true that there are precious few manuscripts from before the seventeenth century with which to compare and substantiate this claim. Given that earlier Sinhala works such as the *Pūjāvaliya* and *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* make mention of the merit involved in reading, listening to, and arranging for the writing of Buddhist texts, it is clear that the underlying claims of *dharmānisaṃsa* texts about the benefits in engaging the Dharma were recognized centuries earlier.

16 Daniel Veidlinger similarly argues that statements in the colophons of Pāli manuscripts from northern Thailand illuminates scribal attitudes and motives toward writing (Veidlinger 2006: 164–71).

17 Sheldon Pollock has commented on the division of labor made earlier between Sanskrit and vernacular language texts, wherein Sanskrit was usually called upon to function in ideational and expressive forms of discourse, while the vernaculars generally served to document the more mundane spheres of everyday life (Pollock 2006: 118). The selective use of Sanskrit aspirations in Sri Lankan manuscripts seems to indicate that their authors continued to value Sanskrit as a linguistic medium alongside writing in Sinhala and Pāli.

18 The *namaskāra* that traditionally opens all Buddhist texts from Sri Lanka reads: "*namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa*."

19 Godakumbura also notes that manuscript colophons provide a vast amount of material relating to religious motives and beliefs at the time (Godakumbura 1980: lii).

20 Note that Gregory Schopen cites the notion of the memory of past births as a common formula in ancient Mahāyāna literature, wherein such power is obtained by doing merit rather than by meditating (Schopen 2005: 193–4).

Part II

Production

4 Redaction, recitation, and writing

Transmission of the Buddha's teaching in India in the early period*

Peter Skilling

Transmission of the Dharma

The transmission of the Buddha's teaching, the Dharma, evidently started during the Buddha's lifetime with the "first sermon," the "Turning the Wheel of the Dharma" (*Dharmacakrapravartanasūtra*). The transmission continued throughout his teaching career, during which the practice of commentary began. During the forty-five years of the Buddha's career, the nuns and monks—and also laywomen and laymen—helped to teach the Dharma, sometimes in his presence, sometimes in the same city, and sometimes in distant towns or cities. Even during the lifetime of the Master, his disciples spread over a large area, and administratively independent monasteries were established.

From the earliest period, the Dharma was transmitted not only by the Buddha, but also directly from disciple to disciple. Monks and nuns explained and amplified the statements of the Master and initiated others into the order. Śāriputra, at that time a young ascetic in search of the truth, achieved insight into the Dharma when taught a summary of "the Great Śramaṇa's teaching" by the monk Aśvajit, one of the Buddha's first five disciples. Śāriputra taught the summary to his companion ascetic, Mahāmaudgalyāyana, who also achieved insight. Soon afterwards, the Buddha designated the two young brahmans as his "foremost pair of disciples." Disciples or "auditors" (*śrāvaka*) played an active role in the dissemination of the Buddha's teachings, and some of their own teachings were preserved and collected in the Sūtra Piṭaka. *Sūtra*s spoken by auditors are found in all of the four Āgamas and four Nikāyas, and the Sarvāstivādins devoted a section of the *Saṃyuktāgama* to "Teachings spoken by the auditors" (*Śrāvaka-bhāṣita*: Bucknell 2006, 2007).

The Buddha declared Pūrṇa Maitrāyaṇīputra to be foremost among the monks who expound the Dharma, and announced that Kātyāyana was foremost of those who explain in detail what the Buddha had taught in brief. The Dharma was also transmitted by nuns. Dharmadinnā was foremost of the nuns who expounded the Dharma; Pāṭācārā was foremost of those who mastered the Vinaya. Somā was "foremost among those who are learned and who preserve the oral tradition;" Kacaṅgalā was "foremost among those who explain the *sūtra*s;" Kṣemā

was "foremost among those who are very wise and very eloquent." These references are found in the Sarvāstivāda tradition as represented by the *Vinaya* and the *Avadānaśataka*; some, but not all, are given in the Mahāvihāravāsin tradition of Sri Lanka.[1]

Naturally enough, the early texts show a concern for the accurate transmission and preservation of the Dharma. A compelling expression of this concern is the Pāli *Saṃgītisutta*. The opening states that after the death of the Jaina leader Mahāvīra (known as Nirgrantha Nāṭaputra in Buddhist texts), his disciples fell into dispute about his teachings. In response to the situation Śāriputra delivered a long inventory of the basic categories of the Buddha's teaching, presented in ascending numerical order from one to ten. In the Pāli version, each category is followed by a refrain, which states that the teaching should be remembered just as it has been pronounced, and that the monks should recite it together in unison and without contention (*Dīghanikāya* III 211):[2]

> There is one *dhamma* which has been correctly proclaimed by the Blessed One, the knower, the seer, the worthy one, the truly and fully awakened one. With regard to this, it should be recited by all of us together, and should not be disputed, in order that this holy life may endure for a long time, which will be for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, from compassion for the world, for the good, for the benefit, for the happiness of gods and humans.

The Pāli *Saṃgītisutta* is transmitted by the Mahāvihāra school of Sri Lanka. The Sarvāstivādins transmitted a counterpart *Saṃgītisūtra* which, amplified by a commentary, became one of the early books of the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma, the *Saṃgītiparyāya*. That is, in the case of the Sarvāstivādins, the preservation and systematization of the Dharma led to the compilation of an Abhidharma text. An (assumed) Dharmaguptaka *Saṃgītisūtra* is preserved in a *Dīrghāgama* translated into Chinese, and fragments of a Gāndhārī version and a Gāndhārī commentary—also assumed to be Dharmaguptaka—are being prepared for publication by Collett Cox at the University of Washington. Another compendium of teachings is the *Daśottarasūtra*/*Dasuttarasutta*. Like the *Saṃgītisūtra*, it is spoken by Śāriputra. In these texts, we see how the early imperative to preserve the Dharma led to the drawing up of itemized and structured compendia of basic categories set within a narrative frame, and, in at least one case, how it led further to the production of an Abhidharma text. Going further, we may, at least in part, count the Abhidharma as a product of the concern for accurate preservation.

In the Pāli *Aṅguttaranikāya*, the Buddha himself addresses the questions of accurate transmission of the Dharma and of fidelity of phrasing and of interpretation (*Aṅguttaranikāya* I 59):

> Two things, O monks, conduce to the confusion and disappearance of the True Dharma (*saddhamma*). What two? The wrong arrangement of words and letters, and the wrong interpretation of the meaning…

> Two things, O monks, conduce to the maintenance, the non-confusion and non-disappearance of the True Dharma. What two? The correct arrangement of words and letters, and the correct interpretation of the meaning…
>
> These two, O monks, slander the Tathāgata. What two? The one who asserts that what was not spoken or uttered by the Tathāgata was spoken and uttered by the Tathāgata, and the one who asserts that what was spoken and uttered by the Tathāgata was not spoken or uttered by the Tathāgata.
>
> These two, O monks, do not slander the Tathāgata. What two? The one who asserts that what was not spoken or uttered by the Tathāgata was not spoken or uttered by the Tathāgata, and the one who asserts that what was spoken and uttered by the Tathāgata was spoken and uttered by the Tathāgata.

These and similar passages reveal that the problem of inauthenticity had arisen by the time these texts were redacted. That the texts of the emergent "bodhisattva movement" or what came to proclaim itself as the "Mahāyāna" faced charges of inauthenticity and met with outright rejection may be seen from phrases and passages that run through the literature, to the extent that to deny the Mahāyāna or its texts was declared to be a grave offence, or that attempts to turn bodhisattvas away from the Prajñāpāramitā were denounced as "the words of Māra" (e.g. Jaini 2002: 105–106). The concern for accurate and authentic transmission of the teaching runs through Buddhist literature and society up to the present.

After the Buddha: the recitation-councils

Our traditions report, more or less unanimously, that in the first rains retreat after the passing of the Buddha, his teachings were recited by five hundred worthies at Rājagṛha. This is called the "recitation-council of the five hundred" or the "first recitation-council."[3] The corpus of texts redacted at the council is called the "root compilation" (Pāli *mūla-saṅgaha*) or the "root recitation" (Sanskrit *mūla-saṃgīti*). One hundred years later, a second council was convened at Vaiśālī to settle a dispute over ten points of monastic discipline. At the end, however, the "Dharma-Vinaya" was again recited—that is, the corpus of teachings was verified and codified, and, it is safe to suggest, expanded, and processed.

These two councils are the only "pan-*saṃgha*" councils—that is, councils that are accepted by the known Buddhist traditions. The accounts of the councils belong, primarily, to the Vinaya tradition and are found in the Vinaya texts of the different schools. That is, it was the Vinaya masters of individual traditions who kept, transmitted, and—retrospectively—shaped the records. Many tellings of the details of the councils exist, and there are, naturally, many conundrums and discrepancies. For over a century, scholars have produced an extensive literature on the nature, historicity, and significance of these and other councils.[4]

After the second council, the monastic order gradually branched into several distinct lineages or schools, which began to hold their own councils. There is no "third Buddhist council" that is accepted by all schools. Records of the councils of most of the schools are now lost—along with their scriptures—and we have only two complete lists, the one of the Mahāvihāravāsin Theravādins of Sri Lanka and the other of the Sāṃmitīyas of northern India.[5] We also have several disjointed accounts of a Sarvāstivādin tradition, or, perhaps, of several Sarvāstivādin traditions.

The best-known account of a "third council" is that of the Mahāvihāra tradition, which maintains that a third council was held at the Mauryan capital of Pāṭaliputra, under the patronage of King Aśoka. The description of the council is artificial and unconvincing. The sponsorship and intervention of Aśoka, or at least his active support of any particular school or faction, is doubtful. In any case, although there are a few references in non-Pāli sources to an event or events during Aśoka's reign that may possibly (but only possibly) be memories of a council, there is no evidence that a grand and pan-*saṃgha* council took place there.

The Sāṃmitīya councils are listed in two texts, the *Mahāsaṃvartanīkathā* and the *Saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛtaviniścaya*. The former was composed in Sanskrit verse by the "Great Poet" (*mahākavi*) Sarvarakṣita in the tenth century, probably in Northeastern India (for Sarvarakṣita see Okano 1998: 10–18). The latter, which survives only in Tibetan translation, is a massive compendium of Buddhist philosophy compiled by Mahāpaṇḍita Daśabalaśrīmitra, probably in northern India in the twelfth century. The two texts list the five recital-councils:[6]

> *The First Council* In the second month after the passing (*parinirvāṇa*) of the Tathāgata, five hundred monks (*bhikṣu*) free of desire (*vītarāga*) compiled[7] the teaching of the Buddha in the Saptaparṇa cave (*guhā*).
>
> *The Second Council* One hundred years after the passing of the Tathāgata, seven hundred monks free of desire compiled the Dharma.
>
> *The Third Council* Four hundred years after the passing of the Tathāgata, when the monastic community (*saṃgha*) had become divided into different groups, each adhering to its own school (*nikāya*), Vātsīputra[8] compiled the Dharma of one school. From that time on, that school was known as the expounders of the Dharma, the Vātsīputrīyas.[9]
>
> *The Fourth Council* Seven hundred years after the passing of the Tathāgata, a senior monk (*sthavira*), the sage (*muni*) Saṃmata, compiled the scriptural traditions (*āgama*) of that school. From that time on, that school has been known as the Sāṃmitīya school.
>
> *The Fifth Council* Eight hundred years after the passing of the Tathāgata, the senior monks (*sthavira*) Bhūtika and Buddhamitra compiled the scriptural traditions of that school.

Not many details are given for the third Sāṃmitīya council, but they are sufficient to demonstrate that the council has no connection with the Mahāvihārin council of Pāṭaliputra.

A comparative study of available accounts of the councils leads to some general conclusions. For the first two councils, the "shared" councils, there is broad agreement. The texts—a wide range from different schools preserved, very incompletely, in different Indic languages and (primarily) Chinese and Tibetan translations and accounts—are talking about an event shared by a *saṃgha*, which viewed itself as a single entity. After these two councils, the picture changes, and the councils become self-validating events for individual schools. The shift is easily seen in the Sāṃmitīya narration. The participants in the first two councils are all worthies, "monks free of desire"—it is this that gives the councils their authority. The Sāṃmitīya account makes a point of noting that by the time of the third council "the monastic community had become divided into different groups, each adhering to its own school"—a statement paralleled in Sarvarakṣita's version:[10]

> In the fourth century [after the Buddha's passing]
> When the community of ascetics had settled into individual *nikāyas*
> The Teaching was settled in purity like the autumn moon
> By the sage Vātsīsuta (i.e., Vātsīputra).

In the fourth council the active figure was the *muni* Saṃmata, in the fifth "the *sthavira* monks Bhūtika and Buddhamitra." There are also shifts in the language. The first council "compiled the teaching of the Buddha," and the second council "compiled the Dharma." But at the third council Vātsīputra "compiled the Dharma of one school (*nikāya*)." At the fourth and fifth councils, the *sthaviras* are said to have "compiled the traditions (*āgama*) of that school."

The Sāṃmitīya account shows a clear evolution from the two pan-*saṃgha* councils to the later school-specific assemblies presided over by individuals who oversee the compilation of the scriptures of a single school. This is seen in the narratives of other schools. In the Mahāvihāra tradition, Moggalliputtatissa presides over the third council. Butön's report of a council in Kashmir (see below) mentions Pūrṇika, while Chinese accounts refer to Kātyānīputra, Vasumitra, and so on (Willemen et al. 1998: 116–121). The later councils were internal affairs of individual schools; at the same time, the first two councils became mythical events, considered foundational by all the schools. This led to a shift in the meaning of *saṃgīti*—the term no longer signified the universal ratification of the saints—the *arhat*s of the councils of the 500 and the 700—but invoked the authority of a single lineage, led by historical individuals. School identity rose to the fore and henceforth prevailed, although of course each school believed that it was transmitting the word of the Buddha accurately.

Accounts of a third council (or of further councils) in Tibetan historical sources such as Butön (Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub, 1290–1364) and Tāranātha (1575–1635) are difficult to interpret. Butön opens his discussion of the "third council" with

the statement that "since it is not [described] in the Āgamas the [accounts] are accordingly conflicting."[11] He presents several versions of the event. The first is the council of Sthavira Vātsīputra, that is, the third council according to the Sāṃmitīya reckoning. Otherwise, "some say" that three hundred years after the Buddha's passing, in the Jalandhara monastery, *arhat*s and unenlightened experts compiled [the Dharma]. Butön then quotes prophecies connected with King Aśoka from the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarīkasūtra* and the *Prabhāvatī*. In the last account presented by the great polymath, "some say" that:[12]

> The purpose [of the third council] was to dispel the apprehension that [the scriptures of] the dispersed eighteen [*nikāya*] were not the word (*vacana*, of the Buddha). The time was three hundred years after the passing of the Teacher. The location was the Kunpana monastery in the land of Kashmir. The patron was the king of Jalandhara, Kanika (Kaniṣka). The redactors were Pūrṇika, etc. and 500 worthies; Bhasumitra [sic] etc. and 500 bodhisattvas, and 250 or 16,000 ordinary scholars (*paṇḍita-pṛthagjana*), who assembled and performed a recitation, and established [the scriptures of] all eighteen [*nikāya*] as the word [*vacana*].

Butön's accounts seem to be fragments of reports of different events or of different councils. The same may be said for the reports given in Chinese sources. In one account, "in the year 500 A.B. Kātyāyanīputra convened a synod in Kāśmīra, which was attended by five hundred *arhat*s and five hundred *bodhisattva*s;" while according to Xuanzang "in the year 400 A.B., king Kaniṣka of Gandhāra, in accord with Pārśva, his advisor, decided to convene a synod" (Willemen et al. 1998: 117).

To sum up: at the two shared councils, the compilers are described as "worthies," and they redact "the word of the Buddha." At later councils, the participants are no longer assemblies of worthies, and they redact the tradition of a single, individual school.

An early generation of western scholars was skeptical about the historicity of the councils, from the first council onwards, an attitude that persists today. It should be obvious that the accounts are not to be taken at face value—they are first-order foundation narratives, and their aim is the validation of tradition rather than historical or historicist "reality." However, when a description of an event is accepted by a tradition as authentic, the account takes on the force of "history" within that tradition, even when, in modern historicist terms, it is not at all historical. The event becomes an ineluctable part of the collective memory of tradition. This is the power of the imaginaire in history, and the legend remains potent even when far removed in space and time. In tenth-century China, Qian Hongshu (r. 947–978) erected 84,000 gold-plated *stūpa*s as part of an act of atonement (Huang 2005: 36–37), a project that must have been inspired by the legend, disseminated in China through several texts such as the *Aśokasūtra*, that Aśoka erected 84,000 *stūpa*s. Not many scholars today accept Aśoka's deed as an historical project, but as legend, it has impacted directly on historical events through emulation.

Rather than doubt the existence of the *saṃgīti*, I would suggest that there were more—perhaps many more—*saṃgīti* than we have records of. If the different schools did not hold their own *saṃgīti*—in most cases, a succession of *saṃgīti* over the centuries, in different centres, depending on the fortunes of the school in terms of patronage and expansion—how are we to explain the many variant redactions of Vinaya and Sūtra that have come down to us? Are we to assume that the redactions came about haphazardly? Nearly a hundred years ago, Louis de La Vallée Poussin wrote (1910: 179):

> While it is impossible to accept the Buddhist opinion, which views [the councils] as ecumenical assemblies after the Nicene type, it is at the same time necessary to explain how Buddhist monastic life, without the help of such solemn assemblies, nevertheless resulted in a sort of "Catholicism," and secured the redaction and the compilation of Canons of scriptures very like one another.

As we have seen above, the concern to preserve the words, letters, and meaning of the "True Dharma" was codified in the scriptures. Compilation and redaction were a natural and inevitable consequence. To transmit a massive textual corpus calls for a complex of decisions regarding language, style, grammar, phrasing, and orthography, as well as formatting and standardization. A new redaction would have required consensus and ratification by the members of the monastic community in question. Our texts reveal a self-consciousness of the role of the redactors (*saṃgītikāra*), who are explicitly and repeatedly referred to in Mahāvihārin commentaries, in Sarvāstivādin texts like the *Vinayavastu*, and in śāstra like the *Abhidharmakośa*. Each school must have held redactional councils, and each school must have been conscious of this, codifying this consciousness—these "memories"—in its own lineage histories, as is done in the *vaṃsa* literature of the Mahāvihāravāsins. Consciousness of redactional lineage—of language and of textual fidelity—is explicit, for example, in the Pāli *Dīpavaṃsa* (especially Chapter V), in the verse preambles to Ācariya Buddhaghosa's commentaries (see for example the *Majjhimanikāya* commentary, Jayawickrama 2003: 73–75), and in the introductions and colophons of Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin texts (Roth 1985). Redactional councils reinforced consciousness of difference with regard to other schools and of authenticity with regard to one's own school.

The idea of the redactional council developed a powerful resonance of authentication and transmission and the term "saṃgīti" was used in titles of Mahāyāna *sūtras*, for example the *Dharmasaṃgītisūtra* and the *Buddhasaṃgīti* (both preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translations).[13] The term also occurs within Mahāyāna *sūtra*s—for example "recitation of the six perfections" in the *Samādhirājasūtra*.[14] Bhāviveka (*ca*. 500–570) and others cite a tradition of a redactional council of the Mahāyāna itself, at which Vajrapāṇi recited the *sūtra*s, but it is not clear when this tradition arose or how widespread it may have been. Haribhadra, who worked at Nalanda during the reign of Dharmapāla (r. *ca*. 770/775–810/812), cites "past teachers" (*pūrvācāryāḥ*) who

refer to it as a "recitation-council of the precious *sūtra*s of the Prajñāpāramitā (*prajñāpāramitā-sūtra-ratna-saṃgīti*).[15] Ratnākaraśānti (first half of the eleventh century) describes the redactor of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* as "the Great Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi who dwells in Aḍakavatī, who follows the Tathāgatas of the Bhadrakalpa to protect their physical bodies and Dharma bodies."[16] Here the principle of redaction runs through the "Auspicious Eon" with its one thousand Buddhas.

Among Buddhist monastic lineages, I would suggest that diversity rather than uniformity was the rule. A certain group of schools developed Abhidharma literatures, and divided their scriptures into three divisions: Vinaya, Sūtra, and Abhidharma (Lamotte 1976: 163–167). It is not certain that all schools adopted this tripartite division, and it is possible that, just as in China, in Tibet, premodern Siam, and India itself, "Tripiṭaka" could mean "complete collection" rather than or at least in addition to three formal divisions. That there were alternate systems of classification is certain. According to Candrakīrti, the Aparaśaila and Pūrvaśaila schools (from the vicinity of Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh) had a seven-fold Piṭaka, consisting of collections of texts on Bodhisattva, Vidyādhara, Sūtrānta, Abhidharma, Vinaya, Vaipulya, and Jātaka (Sorensen 1986: 50–53). Other schools had a five-fold division, including a Dharaṇīpiṭaka (Lamotte 1976: 313).

A history of Indian Buddhism could reasonably be written in terms of *saṃgīti*, *saṃgāyanā*, *saṃgītikāra*, and the many uses of the *saṃ-gī*.[17] The terms carried their force beyond India nearly two millennia later. In Siam, kings held *saṃgīti*, and for the last such event, the Ninth Saṃgīti convened during the reign of King Rama I (1782–1809), a history was written in Pāli, the *Saṃgītivaṃsa*. The term *saṅgāyanā* could also be used for the printing of the *Tripiṭaka*, for example the first printed edition during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910). *Saṅgāyanā* took on a special meaning in ritual chanting, involving formalized performance of the recitation by monks on several preaching thrones. The texts used for this were inscribed on palm leaf and are common in old temple collections. The practice was also followed in Cambodia (Leclère 1917: 405–410). For the royal ceremony during the reign of King Ang Duong (1847–1860), five hundred monks were invited to "*saṅgāyanā*" or "*deśanā saṅgāyanā*" for three days in the palace, and a set of the four monastic requisites was offered to each monk (Pakdeekham 2007 [2550]: 179). In the second half of the twentieth century, the definitive edition of the Pāli Tripiṭaka for the Theravādin tradition became that recited and settled at the "Sixth Council." This was held in Rangoon from May 1954 to May 1956 and was followed by a council for the commentaries from December 1956 to March 1960. By 1999 a CD-ROM edition of the "Sixth Council" text appeared.

Writing down the Tripiṭaka

When and where was the Tripiṭaka written down? Given that several of the most prominent of the "eighteen schools" had their own distinctive Tripiṭakas, we must

rephrase the question: "When and where were the Tripiṭakas written down"?[18] Alternatively, to include other systems of classification, we may ask, "When and where were the Piṭakas written down?" There is no evidence that there was ever a single *written* "Ur-collection" that was accepted by all schools; by the time the schools wrote down their scriptures, the "*mūlasaṃgīti*"—at any rate more an ideal than an historical collection—would have been gradually transformed into several different collections in different varieties of middle Indic. That is, there would be as many commitments of canonical collections to writing, made at different places at different times, as there would have been schools. It is probable that certain individual texts would have been written down independently and could have circulated independently before the grand Piṭakas were codified. Therefore, we must rephrase the question as: "When were the texts of a particular tradition or school written down as *a single project*?"

Only two accounts survive. It is therefore difficult to answer these questions with much confidence. The best-known account is that of the Mahāvihāra tradition, the so-called Pāli canon. According to this version, the Pāli canon along with its commentaries was written down in Sri Lanka, in the first century BCE. To write down a body of texts the size of a Tripiṭaka—even an earlier and sparser prototypical collection—was a stupendous task. Many decisions had to be made: what materials to use and how to obtain and prepare them; what script to use; how to divide, how to format, how to punctuate, and how to paginate the text; and how and where to store the resultant manuscripts. The account given in the *Mahāvaṃsa* (XXXIII, 100–101) is brief and matter-of-fact and does not address any of these questions. The aforementioned Sāṃmitīya account takes us up to eight hundred years after the Nirvāṇa (but what was the basis of the calculation?), but it does not explicitly mention writing. Preserved in Tibetan only, the account only uses forms of the Tibetan verb *bsdu ba*, which I have translated here as "compile." Does this mean that up to its fifth council the Sāṃmitīya school had not written down its scriptural collection?

The *Lalitavistara* and other works, including some Jaina texts, list a superabundance of scripts or writing styles current in India and beyond, each with an emblematic name, and there is no doubt that in some circles—not only the court but also the monastery—writing was regarded as a significant and desirable skill. The idea that Śākyamuni, as a young Bodhisattva, mastered the art of writing was sufficiently important that biographies like the *Lalitavistara* devoted a chapter to the event, and that the Bodhisattva with a writing tablet was one of the scenes of the life of the Buddha chosen for depiction in Gandharan art.[19] According to the *Mahāvastu*, *bodhisattva*s have a very special relationship to writing: *bodhisattva*s are generally the initiators of sciences and skills, including writing systems, of which thirty-two scripts are named (Senart 1882: 135.4).

Later texts sometimes indulge in anachronisms that place the writing of the Buddha's teachings immediately after the Nirvāṇa. In the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarīka*, a Mahāyāna *sūtra* set on the eve of the Nirvāṇa, the Buddha instructs the monks to write down his teachings.[20] The *Manjuśrīmūlatantra* "predicts" that a son of King Ajātaśatru will benefit from the Buddha's teaching and "will have the

word of the Teacher committed to writing in extenso" (*tad etat pravacanaṃ śāstu likhāpayiṣyati vistaraṃ*). The reference is to Udāyin or Udayabhadra, who reigned *ca*. 462–446 BCE.[21] The passage is cited by Butön, who immediately afterwards quotes the eleventh-century *Vimalaprabhā*—a commentary on the *Kālacakra-tantra*—as stating that:

> When the Blessed One had passed away, the redactors (*saṃgītikāra*) wrote down the three vehicles (*yāna*) in books (*pustaka*).

The passage does not say how long after the Nirvāṇa the event took place.

More relevant to our question, perhaps, both Butön (loc. cit.) and Tārānātha report traditions that the texts were written down at—in what was in their system—the "third council." Butön writes (uncharacteristically without giving any source):[22]

> Thus, when the third collection had been made, in order that the word of the Sage (*munivacana*) would not be corrupted through omissions and interpolations made when recited by ordinary people (*pṛthagjana*) who had not achieved *dhāraṇī*, it was redacted in written form in books (*pustaka*). Before that, it had been recited from memory, not through writing.

In his "History of Buddhism" Tārānātha writes that:[23]

> … at the time of the third council, the eighteen monastic orders (*nikāya*) made the teaching (*śāsana*) pure (*viśuddha*), and redacted the Vinaya in writing. Sūtras and Abhidharma that had not yet been redacted in writing were redacted in writing, and those that had already been redacted were revised.

Thus, both Tārānātha and Butön agree that the writing of texts began after the "third council." The fact that Tārānātha discusses the writing down of the Tripiṭaka has not generally been recognized because the passage is mistranslated in the only available English translation.[24] Tārānātha's account points to a gradual writing of the texts and a later standardization, both of which seem natural and plausible. Also noteworthy is the way Butön gives concern for textual corruption as the reason for recording the Buddha's teaching and the manner in which he connects memory and *dhāraṇī*.

No manuscripts of any of these early editions survive. The oldest manuscripts extant today are the Gāndhārī texts, recorded in ink in the Kharoṣṭhī script on birch-bark, some of which may date to the first century. These are followed by some of the palm leaf manuscripts from Central Asia, dating to the second century (Sander 1999).[25] Although the Pāli *texts* are held to be old, the bulk of the surviving *manuscripts* are very late. Von Hinüber (1996: § 6) writes that "The continuous manuscript tradition with complete texts begins only during the late fifteenth century. Thus, the sources immediately available for Theravāda literature are separated from the Buddha by almost 2000 years. It should be kept in

mind, however, that the age of the manuscripts has little to do with the age of the texts they contain." When we take into account the date of the surviving Gāndhārī manuscripts, the Sri Lankan tradition that Pāli manuscripts were written down in the first century BCE, and the various traditions reported in Tibetan histories, we may suggest that Piṭakas were compiled and were written down in different scripts and formats, in the Northwest of India and in Sri Lanka, by about the beginning of the Christian Era, or earlier.

Early written texts

A great deal has been written about the prehistory and history of writing in India.[26] For present purposes, let me repeat the commonplace that, while writing systems existed at the time of the Buddha, writing was not used for the transmission of teachings or texts, which were memorized and transmitted orally.

How were the texts referred to? It appears that they were assigned titles in the early phases of oral transmission—titles must have been one of the principles of organization devised to transmit and retrieve texts. The earliest epigraphic use of titles is in Aśoka's Calcutta-Bairāṭ inscription, which dates to the mid-third-century BCE.[27] Aśoka recommends seven texts by name, with the implication that they were known or would be easy to locate and to learn. The edict is addressed to the monastic order (*saṃgha*) in Western India, far from the Magadhan heartland of Buddhism.

How are titles used in Buddhist literature? Some longer *sūtra*s—especially in *Majjhimanikāya* and *Madhyamāgama*—close with a stock formula in which Ānanda asks the Buddha the name of the "turn of the teaching" (*dharmaparyāya*) that he has just given, and the Buddha responds by supplying not one but several titles. For example, the Buddha assigns the names "With many elements" (Bahudhātuka), "Four chapters" (Catuparivaṭṭa), "Mirror of the Dharma" (Dhammādāsa), "Drum of the deathless" (Amatadundhubhi), and "Unsurpassed victory in battle" (Anuttara Saṃgāmavijaya) to the sūtra we now call *Bahudhātukasutta* (*Majjhimanikāya* 115). The practice of referring to texts by name and by greater text unit is seen in several places in the Vinaya and Sūtra literature. The *Mahāvagga* of the Pāli *Vinaya* and the *Udāna* of the *Khuddakanikāya* relate how the monk Soṇa recites the entire *Aṭṭhakavagga* and is praised by the Buddha for his performance (*Vinaya* I 196.19 foll.; *Udāna* 57–59). In the *Nidānasaṃyutta*, Sāriputta cites a verse from the "Questions of Ajita of the Pārāyaṇa" (*parāyane ajitapañhe*, *Saṃyuttanikāya* II 49.3). In the *Aṅguttaranikāya* a laywoman known as "Nanda's mother" (*Nandamātā upāsikā*) recites the *Pārāyaṇa* (*Aṅguttaranikāya* IV 63.11). In one case, a large group of monks discusses a verse "spoken by the Blessed One, in the 'Questions of Metteya of the Pārāyaṇa' " (*Aṅguttaranikāya* III 399.17). In another case, the Buddha himself cross-references his own statement "in the 'Questions of Puṇṇaka' of the *Pārāyaṇa*" (*Aṅguttaranikāya* I 133.6; II 45.34).

Such references occur not only in Pāli but also in the texts of other schools such as in the Sarvāstivādin/Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya and Sūtra literature.[28]

The recently published Gāndhārī manuscripts also use titles; in the Senior collection there is one manuscript with a "table of contents" (which does not precisely fit the actual contents). It is evident that the collections of different schools and different regions used different titles and that within any single collection there could be alternate titles (for example *Majjhimanikāya* Sutta 26 is called *Pāsarāsi* in some manuscript traditions, and *Ariyapariyesana* in others). There was no standardization of titles, which might be taken as meaning that the titles were devised later, but for the fact that many titles are shared by Mahāvihāra and Sarvāstivādin collections.[29] One potentially rich source for titles and classifications of texts is the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, which should give a pool of data for the first to second centuries CE. Regrettably, the *Mahāvibhāṣā* is not preserved in Sanskrit. The three Chinese translations represent different phases of the development of the text, which may help in the identification of different strata. Further studies of titles in available sources including Chinese and Tibetan translations are needed.

In general, the different schools whose texts have been preserved use verse tables of contents (*uddāna*), usually placed at the end of chapters, sections, and text-units, as a key to the contents. There were several types of summary verses, and they functioned as a sophisticated hierarchical system of cross-reference. The "titles" we use today are drawn from these tables or summary verses. The verses also functioned, at least among those schools that accepted a particular recension, as authoritative guides to the contents of a text. Both the Mahāvihāra tradition (Buddhaghosa in *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* I 25) and the Vaibhāṣikas claim that the *uddānas* were fixed at the first recitation—that is, they enjoy the full authority of the *saṅgītikāras*. The author of the *Abhidharmadīpa* writes (translation after Jaini 2002: 104):

> Only those sūtras should be accepted that have been spoken by the Lord Buddha, and that are to be found in the four Āgamas compiled by the Elders Mahākāśyapa, Ānanda, and so forth, and that have been put together in the summary verses called Uddāna Gāthā by those who presided over the saṃgītis (councils).

An *uddānagāthā* is cited in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (ad *kārikā* 3: 12d—note that in Pradhan's edition it is misspelled as *udāna*-) with the sense that "if you accept this *uddānagāthā*, then you must accept this *sūtra* because it is listed here." These examples show a consciousness of classification and titles, and of a developed or developing "canon"—already in the sense of a closed body of texts or at least of a body of texts accepted as authoritative by one community.[30] Aśoka's Calcutta-Bairāṭ inscription shows that by the third century BCE systems of cross-reference by individual title and by collection were already developed and widespread. The concept of direct citation, usually marked by the closing particle "*iti*," in addition to direct and indirect speech, are all clearly delineated in the inscriptions and in early texts, which are sophisticated and multi-layered documents.

How long after the Buddha was this? This depends on the date accepted for the Buddha's Nirvāṇa, about which there is no consensus. If we assume that the texts and system of reference were already in existence by the time of Aśoka, this means by 250 BE ("Buddhist Era"). According to Sinhalese tradition, this would be about 210 years after the Nirvāṇa; according to the "Northern" schools, it would be about 100 years after the Nirvāṇa.

Picture books in stone

After Aśoka's references, the earliest allusions to Buddhist texts are associated with the great "monuments of merit," the *stūpa*s and caves that belong to the Śuṅga and Kāṇva periods (*ca.* second to first centuries BCE) or earlier—bearing in mind that these monuments were long-term projects that underwent frequent if not constant repair and alteration. The monuments refer to Buddhist literature in two ways—through the carved or painted image and through the engraved or painted word. The short inscriptions that accompany the sculpted representations of *jātaka*s and the life of the Buddha at the Bharhut *stūpa*, inscriptions which date to before 100 BCE, are among the earliest, if not the earliest, written scriptural texts of India. They stand out amongst the corpus of early inscriptions of India by their literary nature. The mass of early inscriptions—including those at Bharhut itself—are donative inscriptions, rich in social, geographical, and religious details. Of the 225 inscriptions from Bharhut, 141 are donative and the remaining 84 are label inscriptions (Salomon 1998: 141). At Sanchi the early inscriptions—842 in number (Salomon loc. cit.) are almost all donative. Both donative and label inscriptions have been found at Pauni (Salomon: 142) near Nagpur in Madhya Pradesh. Label inscriptions are, however, generally rare, and were not usually used at sites like Amaravati (with an important early exception, to be discussed below) and Nagarajunakonda.

The Bharhut inscriptions that concern me here are phrases that function as labels or captions that explain a sculpted scene or supply a title for a *jātaka*.[31] The labels are keywords that connect visual representations to pools of narrative resources—they are links to banks of data. At the same time, some of them are the earliest excerpts of Buddhist texts to survive, and they represent the beginnings of written scriptures. They label or map the rich iconographic programs of the *stūpa*, giving the names of the beings that inhabit the narrative and ritual landscape—of nature spirits, serpent kings, and celestial maidens, or of female deities like Sirimā (L B8 [770]).[32] Some inscriptions allude to cosmology, others to the "awakening trees" (*bodhi*) of past Buddhas. Most of these labels are simply phrases, "convenient short designations" (Lüders 1998: 67), but some are full sentences. One of the longer sentences refers to an as yet unidentified event:[33]

> *mahāsāmāyikaya arahaguto devaputo vokato bhagavato sāsani paṭisandhi* (B 18 [777])

The event described and depicted has not been identified, although several conflicting interpretations have been proposed by scholars since the nineteenth century. The stumbling block is the fact that a deity named “Arahaguto” (equivalent to Sanskrit “Arhadgupta”) cannot be traced in any extant texts, whether in Pāli, Sanskrit, or Chinese. Arahaguto is only known from Bharhut, where he is referred to in one other inscription (B20 [814]). This, along with several other untraceable names in the Bharhut corpus, shows that the monument was conceived according to a local/regional tradition or to the tradition of one of the “eighteen schools” whose texts have not survived. As engraved in stone in the second century BCE, this tradition is more ancient than the present “Pāli Canon.”[34]

Another caption identifies the conception of the Bodhisattva (here called “the Blessed One,” *bhagavā*) in the form of an elephant, descending to enter the womb of his mother:

> *Bhagavato ūkraṃti* (B 19 [801])
> The conception of the Blessed One.

Accompanying a splendid representation of dancers and worshippers is the legend:

> *sudhammā devasabhā bhagavato cūḍāmaho* (B 21 [775])
> The Sudharmā Assembly-hall of the Gods: the festival of the Blessed One’s top-knot.

Some short sentences describe events in Śākyamuni’s career:

> *aj[ā]tasat[u] bhagavato vaṃdate* (B 40 [774])
> Ajātaśatru pays homage to the Blessed One.

> *erapato nāgarājā bhagavato vadate* (B 37 [753])
> The Nāga King Erapato pays homage to the Blessed One.

> *digha-tapasi sise anusāsati* (B 63 [692])
> Dighatapasi instructs his disciples.

One of the longer sentences refers to a celebrated event that took place early in Śākyamuni’s career (Figure 4.1):

> *jetavana anādhapeḍiko deti koṭi saṃthatena keṭā* (B 32 [731])
> Anādhapeḍika presents the Jetavana, having bought it for a layer of crores.

Around the edge of this scene, two buildings are identified by inscriptions (Figures 4.2 and 4.3):

> *kosabak[u]ṭi* (B 33 [732])
> The Kosambi hut [of the Buddha].

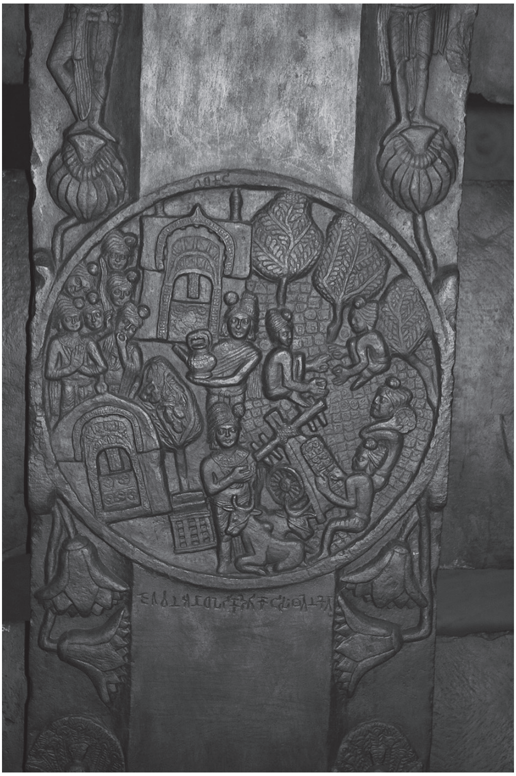


Figure 4.1 “Anadhapedika presents the Jetavana, having bought it for a layer of crores.” An early inscribed narrative scene from the Bharhut *stūpa*, depicting how the financier Anāthapiṇḍika purchased a grove from Prince Jeta by covering the ground with gold coins. The Jetavana was the most famous of the Buddha’s residences, and the scene is found twice at Bharhut as well as on the broken inscribed pillar from Amaravati *stūpa.* Indian Museum, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. (Photo courtesy of Peter Skilling)

gadhakuṭi (B 34 [733]))
The fragrant hut [of the Buddha].

One unique label inscription is significant in several ways. It refers to what in the Pāli collection is known as the *Aṇḍabhūtajātaka* (no. 62). The label gives not a title but the first line of the verse of the *jātaka* (Figure 4.4):

Yaṃ bramano avayesi jatakaṃ (B 51 [810])
The jātaka [beginning with] ‘because the brahman played’.

This shows that the practice of referring to a verse text by giving its first line was already in vogue. Furthermore, insofar as the verses of the *jātaka* are considered



Figure 4.2 Close-up of Jetavana, showing the "fragrant hut" of the Buddha. Indian Museum, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. (Photo courtesy of Peter Skilling.)

by tradition to be spoken by the Buddha, it is one of the earliest examples of a citation of *buddhavacana*.

Bharhut attests to the development of the narratives of the life of the Buddha, of *jātaka* stories, and of cosmology, or at least of deities. It memorializes space, both "historical" sites connected with the life of the Master, and "mythical" sites like the Sudharmā Hall in Indra's heaven.[35]

The Bharhut scenes discussed above portray the early phase of the Buddha's career. A pillar from the south of India gives scenes from several periods. The broken pillar—partially intact, with inscribed narratives on three faces—was discovered at the site of the Amaravati stupa in 1958–1959.[36] Ghosh and Sarkar suggest "a date slightly earlier than the rail-stage of Bharhut and the gate-stage of Sanchi, perhaps late second century BC." The three surviving faces depict nonfigural scenes from the life of the Buddha, with captions in Prakrit in Brāhmī script. One face depicts the city of Śrāvastī, showing the Jetavana and the covering of the ground with gold coins by Anāthapiṇḍada—the celebrated event mentioned above. Another face depicts "a town with storeyed mansions, located at a sharp bend along a river;" the label informs us that this is Dhanyakada, that is, Amaravati itself (Dehejia 1997: 145). On the remaining face, a series of scenes depicts stages on the Buddha's last journey, that is, a part of a *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. Five of the accompanying captions survive. They read:

> *bahuputa-cetiya vesālakāni cetiyāni*
> The Bahuputa Shrine and the shrines of Vesāli.
>
> *cāpala-cetiye māro yācate osaṭh-iti*
> At Cāpala Shrine Māra requests "the [Blessed One] to relinquish [his life]."

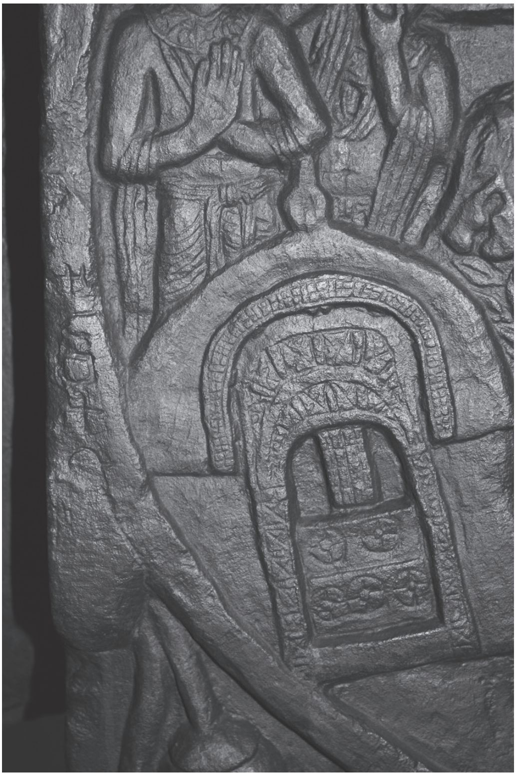


Figure 4.3 Close-up of Jetavana, showing the "Kosambi hut." Indian Museum, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. (Photo courtesy of Peter Skilling.)

vesāliye viharati mahāvane kuḍāgārasālāya
[The Blessed One] resides in Vesālī in the Mahāvana, in the pavilion with the gabled roof.

nāgāpalogana
The elephant's gaze.

sālavane bhagavato parinivute
The Blessed One passes away in the Sāla grove.

Dehejia remarks that "the scenes chosen for portrayal, and the phrases used in the inscribed labels, indicate close familiarity with the text of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*; in fact, viewers unfamiliar with the text would not have understood most of the inscribed notations" (Dehejia 1997: 143). We might describe the inscribed scenes as the earliest extant version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, one of the great classical narrative texts of Buddhism.



Figure 4.4 Bharhut, Aṇḍhabhūtajātaka (Jātaka 62). After Coomaraswamy 1956, fig. 69. The Prakrit insciption reads "yaṃ bramana avayasi jātakam."

One other recently excavated site has yielded stone sculptures with inscribed labels. This is Kanaganahalli in Karnataka. Some of the carved *jātaka* slabs bear labels with Prakrit inscriptions.[37] The labels give the word "*jātaka*" first, followed by the name: *jātakaṃ sajiniya[ṃ]* (Das 2004: pl. X), *jātakaṃ chaddatiyaṃ*

(Dehejia 2007: Fig. XIII.3), etc. Other labelled slabs depict scenes from the life of the Buddha; particularly impressive are two slabs recording the donation of and localities in the Jetavana, both of which "make extensive use of inscribed labels to identify the various structures that Anathapindaka then raised within the park" (Dehejia 2007: 291). A slab depicting King Aśoka is labelled *raya asoka* (Dehejia fig. XIII.13; *Indian Archaeology* 1997–98 pl. 72). Regrettably an excavation report of the site, arguably one of the most important for the study of Buddhist texts, has not yet been published.

Conclusions

Where does all this lead us? This paper is an exploration, an attempt to re-examine the rise of the use of writing in relation to the transmission of texts. Some of our earliest written donative records from India and from Sri Lanka refer to the "reciters" (*bhāṇaka*), recording their contributions to the construction of stūpas and caves. That is, we can follow the activity of reciters at the same time that the use of writing is developing. At Bharhut donations were made by specialists in the "*peṭaka*"—that is a section of or commentary on the scripture—and in the "five *nikāyas*," that is, five collections of scriptures (Lüders A 56 [856] and A 57 [857]; see also p. 71). Donations were made by the reciters Isipālita, Valaka, Isidina, and Kanhila (Lüders A59, A 61, A 62, A 63). Other donations by reciters are recorded at Karli and at Amaravati, and in early cave dedications from Sri Lanka (Paranavitana 1970: cvi-cvii; 2001: 270–271). At Sanchi the donors included a royal scribe (*rājalipikāra*) and several writers or clerks (*lekhaka*), and I suspect that the "professional" donors such as the *seṭṭhis* and *gahapatis* would usually have been literate.[38]

It would be absurd to expect the use of writing to have replaced the oral practices of the reciters suddenly or abruptly. The period from the second century BCE to the second century CE was an important one for the development of Buddhist scriptures. During this period the reciters thrived, grand monuments were erected and embellished, and manuscript culture developed. Recitation, depiction, and writing flourished side by side. New ideas about the nature of the Bodhisattva and the Buddha came to the fore, giving rise to new forms of devotion and to intense debate. Some of these ideas became what one might term "movements"; they were recorded in "Vaitulya" or "Vaipulya" texts and evolved into the Mahāyāna movement and the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s.

This was also an age of classification, exegesis, narration, and innovation. Abhidharma, Vaitulya, and Avadāna traditions, recited and written, evolved, making it an exceptionally creative and productive period in the intellectual and literary history of Buddhism. The reciters branched out, inspired by new texts, and helped to circulate new ideas across India and beyond (Skilling 2004). Figures known as "reciters of Dharma" (*dharmabhāṇaka*) were central in the dissemination of the burgeoning Mahāyāna sūtra literature (Drewes 2006; Nance 2008). The relationship between these reciters of the Dharma and the earlier reciters mentioned in the Mahāvihāra commentarial tradition and in inscriptions remains unclear.

Gombrich has proposed "the rise of the Mahāyāna is due to writing" (1990: 21). Like many bold statements, this is an over-simplification. Part of Gombrich's argument is that the Vinaya schools had a mechanism—the reciter system—to preserve and transmit their texts, while the Mahāyāna did not. How could the Mahāyāna have preserved its texts, otherwise than through writing? This ignores the fact that the monastics who transmitted the Mahāyāna sūtras themselves belonged to the Vinaya schools and lived in monasteries. The *Ugraparipṛcchā* and other texts show that monks with various specialities and inclinations dwelt together in the same monastery: the greatly learned ones (*bahuśruta*), the dharma-preachers (*dharmabhāṇaka*), the experts in Vinaya (*vinayadhara*), the experts in the summaries (*mātṛkādhara*), the experts in the *bodhisattva-piṭaka* (*bodhisattvapiṭakadhara*), the wilderness-dwellers (*āraṇyaka*), the meditators (*dhyānin*), the followers of the bodhisattva vehicle (*bodhisattvayānika*), and so on (Nattier 2003: 273–274 and Appendix 3). A monastery sympathetic to the new movement, or a sympathetic community within a single monastery or in affiliated monasteries, could have agreed to institute recitations just as easily as they could have agreed to copy and store manuscripts.

Surely, the situation was much more complex. Is it not possible that, in addition to Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, the composition and transmission of the complex and massive technical literature of the age—exegesis, Abhidharma, *śāstra*—presupposed writing? The relation between writing and Buddhist literature in this period was interactive and dynamic. The movement into a new storage system—from memory to the written word—did not mean that the exercise of memory was abandoned, or even that it was eclipsed—only that its functions and contexts changed. Literature—and other arts—flourished, and the use of the written word inspired new possibilities. Any writing down entailed redaction and revision, as texts moved from one storage system to another. It is probable that different Vinaya schools—let us remember that they were autonomous, and spread over large regions—participated in the evolution of scripts and manuscript formats, starting with imported or regional styles and developing their own forms and conventions. The main scriptural schools may have preferred particular writing styles, as, it seems, the Sāṃmitīyas preferred the "bhaikṣukī" or "arrow-headed" script (Hanisch 2006). Given that the Buddhist monasteries must have been the greatest producers of manuscripts, is it likely that they did not actively advance manuscript culture, including the arts of writing?[39] Moreover, the "Mahāyānists" would have shared in this grand movement from oral to written culture (a movement that retained many of its oral metaphors, ideals, and practices). In sum, the medium was not quite the message.

Notes

* References to Pāli texts are to the editions of the Pāli Text Society, unless otherwise noted, by volume, page, and first line of passage in question. Unless otherwise stated, translations are by the author. Titles of texts are italicized; general Indic terms for genres or textual classes (*jātaka, sūtra*) are not. In my translations from Tibetan I supply Sanskrit terms in parentheses as appropriate; these are standard equivalents but there is no

absolute guarantee that the original Sanskrit used the exact term. I thank Nalini Balbir, Justin Meiland, and Jan Nattier for their comments and corrections.

1 For references to the attainments of the nuns see Skilling 2001.

2 In a different context, the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, a relatively early Mahāyāna *sūtra*, uses the phrase *saṃgāyiṣyāma vayam āyuṣmaṃto na vivadiṣyāmaḥ* (Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya et al. 2002: § 142), which parallels the Pāli. The Sarvāstivādin *Saṃgītisūtra* uses a different phrasing: *te vayaṃ samhitāḥ samagrāḥ saṃmodamānā bhūtvā saṃśayāya na vivādāmahe* (Stache-Rosen 1968: 45). I cite the Pāli versions of this and other *sūtra*s not because they are more authentic but because they are more accessible to the general reader. It is important to stress that other schools transmitted their own versions of these or similar texts.

3 There is no exact English equivalent for the Indic term "*saṃgīti*," and I use here the clumsy makeshift "recitation-council," or more often simply "recitation," "redaction," or "council."

4 The councils in general have been studied by Minayeff (1894), La Vallée Poussin (1910, 1976), Bareau (1955a; also 1955b; 1966: 26–30; 1970), Lamotte (1976: 136–154; 297–300), Renou and Filliozat (1953 §§ 2212–2220), and Warder (1970, Chap. 7). Przyluski (1926–1928) devoted a study to the first council, Hofinger (1946) a study to the second. Franke (1908) studies the first two councils using mainly Pāli sources; Frauwallner (1994) evaluates the Sinhalese chronicles. The early studies of La Vallée Poussin, Bareau, and Lamotte are unsurpassed and remain required reading. Hallisey (1992) is one of the few scholars to break the mould and rethink the question of "councils." Other thoughtful contributions are Tilakaratne 2000 (who emphasizes the important connection between the councils and establishing harmony within the order) and Witanachchi 2006. (I regret that I am unable to consult the considerable Japanese-language scholarship on the councils.)

5 For the spelling "Sāṃmitīya" see Okano 1998: 280, n. 4.

6 What follows is a summary of Daśabalaśrīmitra's account (for an earlier English translation see Skilling 1987; for Tibetan with German translation see Okano 1998: 434–436).

7 "Compiled" renders the Tibetan *yaṅ dag par bsdu bar mdzad do*. The phrasing differs for each council: *saṅs rgyas kyi bstan pa … yaṅ dag par bsdu bar mdzad do* for the first council; *chos yaṅ dag par bsdu ba mdzad do* for the second; *chos bsdus so* for the third; *de'i luṅ ñid bsdu ba mdzad do* for the fourth; and *de'i luṅ rnams bsdu ba ñid du byas so* for the fifth. Other Tibetan translations of *saṃgīti* include *yaṅ dag par brjod pa* and *yaṅ dag par bgro ba* (often written *'gro ba*).

8 Sarvarakṣita has *muni-vātsī-suta*, m.c. for "Vātsīputra." The Tibetan of Daśabalaśrīmitra reads *gnas ma bu pā ra pādsi su tras. "*gNas ma bu" is a standard translation of Vātsīputra; it is followed by the transliterated form *pādsi su tra* (correct *su tra* to *pu tra*: a correct transcription is given in the following sentence). I can make no sense of *pāra*. Could be a scribal error for *para* = Skt. *vara*, "the illustrious"?

9 *chos smra byed = chos smra ba, dharmabhāṇaka*?

10 Okano 1998: 278.

11 Bu-ston 1988: 131–134; tr. Obermiller 1932: 96–101, Vogel 1985: 104–109. See also Ruegg 1985. Other Tibetan scholars bring together and discuss these and other sources on the council, using extant translations or following earlier works like those of Butön. These include Mkhas-grub-rje (1385—1438) and Paṇ-chen bSod-nams grags-pa (1478—1554) (Lessing and Wayman 1968: 57–69; Panchen Sonam Dragpa 1996: 11–13).

12 Bu-ston 1988: 131.23. There are variant spellings of "Kunpana monastery," which is not very convincing.

13 The two sūtras cannot be dated; as a working hypothesis, one might place them in the first century CE. According to *IDP News* No. 28 (Winter, 2006) a manuscript of Dharmarakṣa's Chinese translation of the *Buddhasaṅgīti* dated CE 296 is the

"oldest dated Buddhist manuscript." The entry on *saṃgīti* in *the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* is useful: Edgerton 1953: 547–548.

14 *Ṣaṭpāramitā-saṃgīti*: Dutt 1954: 457.9, translated in Pagel 2006: 24.

15 *Abhisamayālaṃkārāloka* in Wogihara 1932: 5.6.

16 *Sāratamā* in Jaini 1979: 4.15 *saṅgītikāraḥ aḍakavatīnivāsī vajrapāṇirmahābodhisattvaḥ. sa hi bhādrakalpikānāṃ tathāgatānāṃ rūpakāyasya dharmakāyasya ca rakṣādhikṛtaḥ pṛṣṭato'vagataḥ* … Unfortunately the rest of the passage is missing.

17 For a suggested evolution of the now popular term *saṃgāyanā*, which "is not found used as a substantive in canonical or post-canonical Pāli works," see Witanachchi 2006: 722. The importance of councils is seen not only in Buddhism but also in Jainism, where the term *vācanā* is used (see e.g. Kapadia 2000: Chap. III). Comparative study of Buddhist *saṃgīti* and Jaina *vācanā* is a desideratum.

18 Only one Tripiṭaka – the Pāli canon, transmitted by the Mahāvihāravāsin Theravādins, has survived intact (as defined or codified by Buddhaghosa or at the time of Buddhaghosa, *ca*. fifth century CE). We do not know much if anything at all about the collections of many of the schools (for a recent survey of the canonical texts of the Śrāvaka schools excluding the Mahāvihāra, see Oberlies 2003). For direct albeit brief citations from scriptures of the eighteen schools, see Skilling 1997. In this article, I use "eighteen schools" not as an exact or historical figure – it is not, being only a convention – but as a global term for early Buddhist tradition in its entirety and in its diversity. The fact that only a single Tripiṭaka has survived has been taken carelessly to mean that there has only ever been a single Tripiṭaka, or that other Tripiṭakas are derived from or dependent upon the Pāli canon. This in turn has caused considerable confusion in Buddhist studies, which even today often treats the Pāli canon as "*the* Tripiṭaka" – the sole representative of "early Buddhism" – and sets up a false dichotomy between "the Canon" and "the Mahāyāna."

19 The Pāli *Jātakanidāna*, one of the latest of the Indic-language biographies of the Buddha, does not mention the Bodhisattva's study of writing, and the event is not, as far as I know, depicted in the art of Sri Lanka, South India, or Southeast Asia.

20 For this *sūtra*, see Csoma de Körös in Ross [1912] 1991: 433–436 and Feer 1881: 239–242, and also Feer 1883: 153–175. For other examples of anachronistic reference to writing see von Hinüber 1990: Chap. XV.

21 *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, in Vaidya 1964: 471, Chap. 55, vv. 299–300; cf. citation in Bu-ston 1998: 133.23; Obermiller II 101; Vogel 1985: 108–109. Butön's citation gives the name – or the code or abbreviation of the name – differently: A son of Ajātaśatru named "Upa" will write the teachings of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*) in letters *('jam dpal rtsa rgyud las, ma skyes dgra'i bu u pa źes bya bas saṅs rgyas kyi gsuṅrab rnams yi ger 'bri bar 'gyur ro źes zer ro*. For Udāyin see Lamotte 1976: 102.

22 Bu ston 1988: 133.20, *de ltar bsdu ba gsum pa byas nas so so skye bo gzuṅs ma thob pa rnams bka' lhag chad du 'don pa las thub pa'i gsuṅ mi ñams par bya ba'i phyir glegs bam yi ger bkod kyi de yan chad blo la 'don gyi yi ge med zer ro*. The phrase *lhag chad du* is not clear to me. My translation is a guess, based on the fact that *lhag ma* = *avaśeṣa*, *śeṣa* and *'chad pa* means, "to cut."

23 Schiefner 1868: 48:19; Chattopadhyaya 1980: 95.

24 In Chattopadhyaya 1980: 95, the passage is rendered as "The controversies subsided at the Third Council, when all those belonging to the eighteen sects jointly purified the Law and codified the Vinaya. Also those portions of the Sūtra-piṭaka and the Abhidharma which were not codified before received codification and those portions which were already codified were revised." The terms translated with forms of "codify" are in the Tibetan *yi ger bkod*, "to put into writing." (Schiefner's German translation is not available to me.) Tāranātha makes other references to writing, as does Sumpa Khenpo (Das 1908: 137–138), but space does not allow me to discuss them here. See Skilling 2006 for narratives that link the depiction of the Buddha with scriptural citations.

25 One of the oldest surviving doctrinal texts from northern India that I know of is a fragment of a stone umbrella inscribed with four truths of the noble (*ariya-sacca*). It was found, appropriately, at Sarnath, the site of the "turning of the wheel of the Dharma," that is, the first enunciation of the four truths (Konow 1981; Tsukamoto 1996: Sārnāth 94, p. 913), and is dated by Konow to the second or third century CE.
26 See von Hinüber 1989, Falk 1993, Salomon 1996, Salomon 1998 and Pinault 2001. Norman's important studies are reprinted in Norman 2006; see Barrett 1992 for Ji Xianlin's comments and criticisms. For an early discussion of the writing and Buddhism see Rhys Davids [1903] 1999, Chaps. VII, VIII; see also Griffiths 1999, 34 foll.
27 For the text see Bloch 1950: 154–156; for the site see the splendid Falk 2006: 106–108.
28 For further references, see Lamotte 1976: 172–178. These and similar internal citations have been much discussed, especially in relation to the textual history of the *Khuddkanikāya* and "*kṣudraka*" texts, for which see the classic Lévi 1915.
29 For the titles of the texts cited by Vasubandhu in his *Vyākhyāyukti*, see Skilling 2000: Appendix 4.
30 See here the passage from Saṃghabhadra's *Nyāyānusāra* cited in de La Vallée Poussin 1925: 23, n. 1.
31 What are the earliest label inscriptions? Can they be the Aśokan "elephant labels" – the epigraphs signifying that an image of an elephant represents the Buddha – at Girnar (Bloch 1950: 135; Falk 2006: 118–120), Kalsi (Bloch, loc. cit.; Falk 124–126), or Dhauli (Bloch, loc. cit., who judges the label to be post-Aśokan; Falk 113–115)? For label inscriptions, see Salomon 1998: 120–121.
32 References to Bharhut inscriptions follow Lüders' system (1998: Preface, p. vi).
33 I do not translate the inscription because the meaning is not clear to me. I find Lüder's "Descended from the (hall of) the Great Assembly the angel Arahaguta apprises the Holy One of (his future) reincarnation" problematic.
34 See Lüders 1998: 66–71 for a detailed discussion and different conclusions.
35 For the importance of Indra's Heaven, the Trayastriṃśabhavana, see Skilling 2008.
36 Ghosh and Sarkar 1964/65; Tsukamoto 1996: Amarāvatī 205–212; Dehejia 1997: 144–146. The readings of the inscriptions given here follow the "restored" versions of Ghosh and Sarkar, with one correction: I read *Cāpala-cetiye* for their *Cāpala-cetiya*, the locative ending being clear in the reproduction of the rubbing.
37 For early reports on Kanaganahalli see *Indian Archaeology 1994–95 – A Review*, 37–39; *Indian Archaeology 1996–97 – A Review*, 53–55; *Indian Archaeology 1997–98 – A Review*, 93–96; *Indian Archaeology 1998–99 – A Review*, 66; for articles see Das 2004; Dehejia 2007, the latter the most important study to date.
38 See Appendix B in Chakravarti 1996.
39 If recent proposals that "the first written version of the Mahābhārata belongs to the final centuries preceding the Common Era" (Bronkhorst 2007: 94–98) have any merit, then the early written versions of Buddhist scriptures and of the great epic would have been contemporary. However, the idea that the epic was written down at such an early date is a novel hypothesis, and there does not seem to be sufficient evidence to propose that textual communities other than the Buddhists – with the very possible exception of the Jains – were large producers of manuscripts.

5 Diverse aspects of the Mongolian Buddhist manuscript culture and realms of its influence

Vesna A. Wallace

The spoken word flutters away,
But the written word remains.[1]

(Mongolian Proverb)

Introduction

Scholarship on Buddhist manuscripts written by Mongolian authors in the Mongolian and Tibetan languages is relatively undeveloped despite the availability of abundant unexamined material. In terms of Mongolian Buddhist literature, with the exception of a few scholars,[2] the Mongolists of the twentieth century chiefly engaged in cataloging the Mongolian *Kanjur* (Tib. *bKa' 'gyur*) and *Tanjur* (Tib. *bsTan 'gyur*) and analyzing these two collections. Their efforts of editing, translating, and analyzing the Buddhist manuscripts were focused primarily on Buddhist historical and literary works composed in the Mongolian language. Reasons for the little progress in this area vary, ranging from the political and economic conditions in Mongolia, and scholars' predominant interest in Mongolian Shamanic and folk religions, to their lack of interest in Mongolian Buddhist cultural heritage. Equating the essential character of Mongolian Buddhism with Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhist scholars have had the tendency to overlook the cultural uniqueness of the Mongolian Buddhist tradition with its distinctively Mongolian cultural elements that permeate its literary, artistic, and ritual traditions. Since the thirteenth century, the written word has had the power to linguistically unite the literate Mongols scattered throughout different Mongolian territories and speaking different Mongolian dialects.

The Mongols have a long and rich tradition of a production of Buddhist manuscripts, which dates back to the thirteenth century and amalgamates various influences from diverse cultures with which the Mongols have come into contact through their nomadic lifestyle, military campaigns, trade, diplomatic relations and exchange of Buddhist scholars, artists, and craftsmen. Through a well-developed relay system established in the early thirteenth century, which connected the Mongol empire from the east and west, the Mongols encountered a variety of cultures within a short period. As a consequence, throughout different periods, the

Mongols wrote texts of different genres and on a variety of Buddhist themes in Uighur, Mongolian, Tibetan, Manchu, and Chinese languages. The development of the Mongolian Buddhist manuscript culture is closely tied to the history of translation of Buddhist texts into Mongolian, which, according to some scholars, dates back to the translation of the *Tripiṭaka* from Sogdian and Uighur in the seventh and eighth centuries CE. However, we can with greater certainty trace the emergence of Buddhist written culture among Mongolian-speaking peoples to the thirteenth century, which took place in connection with several determining events—namely, the Mongols' first and small-scale conversion to Tibetan Buddhism, the formation of the literary Mongolian language and Uighur-Mongolian script, and cultural influences from the neighboring Chinese, Tangut, Kitan, Jurchen, Inner Asian Turkic peoples, and Tibetans. The renaissance of Mongolian Buddhist written culture began in the late sixteenth century with the second conversion of the Mongols to Tibetan Buddhism and with the transition from the Middle Mongolian to the classical Mongolian language. Unlike indigenous Mongolian Shamanism, Buddhism has been primarily a literature-based tradition; its spread throughout Inner Asia was facilitated by dissemination of Buddhist texts in a variety of forms—from stone inscriptions, referred to by the Mongols as "stone books" (*chuluun nom*), and manuscripts to printed texts. Similarly, Mongol khans who adopted Buddhism in the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries and Manchu emperors who ruled Mongolia from the late seventeenth century until the early twentieth century endeavored to promote Buddhism and unify their respective territories through dissemination of Buddhist texts.

Starting from the seventeenth until the early twentieth centuries, the Tibetan language increasingly functioned as the primary language of the Buddhist cultural scene in Mongolia, steadily diminishing the creation of Buddhist texts in the classical Mongolian language. According to the archives of the Mongolian Peoples' Revolutionary Party, by the early 1930s, less than one percent of Buddhist monks in Mongolia were literate in the classical Mongolian language. To my knowledge, approximately five hundred Mongolian authors of various ethnic groups wrote their collected works mainly in the Tibetan language. They saw the literary Tibetan language as a common property of Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese Buddhist intellectuals, who constituted their literary audience.

In contrast to the xylographic production[3] carried out within large monastic institutions, the majority of Buddhist texts that circulated among the nomads and monks living in Mongolia's vast pasturelands and deserts were handwritten texts, often copied by the hands of literate *lamas* traveling throughout the countryside. When political conditions in the late 1980s allowed the freedom of religion, a revitalization of Buddhism preceded that of Shamanism in part due to the availability of the Buddhist literature that escaped the destruction of Buddhist texts during the communist period, as significant amounts of texts were secretly stored in private homes, buried under the ground, hidden in caves, or ignored by revolutionaries for reasons inexplicable to us.

In addition to diverse scripts[4] and languages, the Mongolian authors adopted various writing implements and techniques of preparing manuscripts from

other cultures. The multicultural influences on the manuscript tradition in Mongolia are reflected in its manuscript formats, in the types of tools and materials used in writing, in the methods of production of different types of ink, and in decorative, artistic styles implemented in the ornamentation and illustration of manuscripts.

The four most prevalent types of Mongolian Buddhist manuscripts that have been preserved to this day are the following:

1 Handwritten, paper copies of the handbooks containing ritual texts, prayers, *sādhanas*, the divinatory and astrological texts used in daily services and on special occasions, and certain *mahāyāna-sūtras*, and *tantras* that were widely used, disseminated, and worshipped by Mongolian *lamas* and the lay populace
2 Handwritten texts written on a thin transparent paper in preparation for xylographic copies
3 Manuscripts that served as proofreading copies of their new xylographic editions
4 Musical manuscripts produced for ritual services and Buddhist dramatic performances.

Formats of Mongolian Buddhist manuscripts

The Mongols wrote their manuscripts in four different book formats—(1) in the Tibetan *dpe cha* style modeled after the format of Indian palm leaf manuscripts, (2) in the form of a bound notebook, (3) in the format of a folded, accordion-like book, and (4) in the form of a scroll—all of which were also common in the literary cultures of the Mongols' immediate neighbors and those with whom they came into contact through their wide network of international relations. The manuscripts written in the *dpe cha* format are called in the Mongolian language "*sudars*" (Skt. *sūtra*), and for the making of such books, the Mongols coined the verb *sudarchilakh*. The manuscripts written in the format of a *sudar* are traditionally classified into three main groups with regard to their size: as large, average-sized, and abbreviated *sudars*.

Those belonging to the category of large *sudars* consist of multiple volumes and contain more than 1,000 pages. The largest preserved *sudar* in Mongolia is the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-mahāyānasūtra*, popularly known among the Mongols as the *Jadamba*, which is written with nine precious substances on black paper measuring 32 × 91 cm. Those of an average size are considerably shorter and consist of approximately 500–700 pages. In contrast, the abbreviated *sudars* are small, compact texts, which are often short prayers, *dhāraṇīs*, and brief summaries of longer texts. Together, they often form miscellaneous (*thor bu*) collections belonging to individual *lamas* or to lay individuals who implemented them in their daily devotions. Small *sudars* have been written down primarily for two reasons: for the sake of gaining merit or due to the inability of poor *lamas* and nomads to afford printed versions. As a private collection, small *sudars* have been invariably wrapped together in the same cloth (*barindag*), and owing to

their convenient size, they have proven to be suitable to the nomadic way of life. They have been traditionally carried next to one's bosom under an article of the Mongolian clothing called "*deel*," and for this reason, they are also referred to as "bosom books" (*övör nom*). A large number of the collections of small *sudars* that once belonged to the *lamas* of the past and that are now available in Mongolia's flea markets and antique shops attest to their prior, widespread usage. As a belief in their protective power remains to this day, it is not uncommon to see a small *sudar* attached to the rearview mirror of a motor vehicle or several of its pages taped onto the car window for protection from car accidents.

In terms of a general structure, there is very little difference among the manuscripts written in the large and average size Mongolian *sudars*, as they commonly consist of the following seven parts: the external title page (*dontor*) or the book cover, table of contents (*garchig*), the page of salutation (*takhilyn khuudas*), the benedictory page, the main text, and colophon (*tögsgöliin üg*). Tables of contents in the Mongolian language manuscripts written in the *sūtra* format and in the form of a folded book differ from those in printed texts. They are most frequently written in the center of the page, with words following the line from top to bottom and left to right, and are framed with single or a double quadrangular border. However, at times, the table of contents without such borders can be also found. The handwritten *sudars* that are translations from another language occasionally have the tables of contents written in more than one script or language in parallel lines from top to bottom. In some *sudars*, a concise table of contents is written first, and the complete table of contents is given in a subsequent page of salutation.

As in the case of printed *mahāyāna-sūtras*, so in their handwritten forms, a page of reverent salutation is traditionally wrapped in a ceremonial scarf (*khadag*). The page of salutation is often decorated with an illustration of a Buddhist deity related to the given text. In the manuscripts of *mahāyāna-sūtras*, a considerable number of such illustrations may fill even two or three pages, but in small size *sudars*, they are rarely found. The margins of the page of salutation are decorated with a single or two-layered, spiral pattern. Sometimes, the stars, sun, moon, clouds, and mountains are illustrated above the painting of a Buddhist deity, and below it are portrayed the elephant tusks, fireflies, fish, vase, and other auspicious symbols, and various decorative designs. A colophon is written either in verse or in prose and may contain from five to one hundred and fifty lines. The information pertaining to the author, translator, and scribe is usually given after the colophon.

While manuscripts in the *sudar* format were written in Mongolian, Tibetan, and Manchu languages respectively or simultaneously in all three, Buddhist manuscripts fashioned in the format of a notebook[5] were invariably written in the classical Mongolian language (Figure 5.1). The majority of the manuscripts written in the format of a notebook are historical works dealing in one way or other with the history of Mongolian Buddhism. Unlike works on philosophy, ritual, astrology, and medicine, which were commonly written in Tibetan for a multinational Buddhist audience, these manuscripts were written exclusively

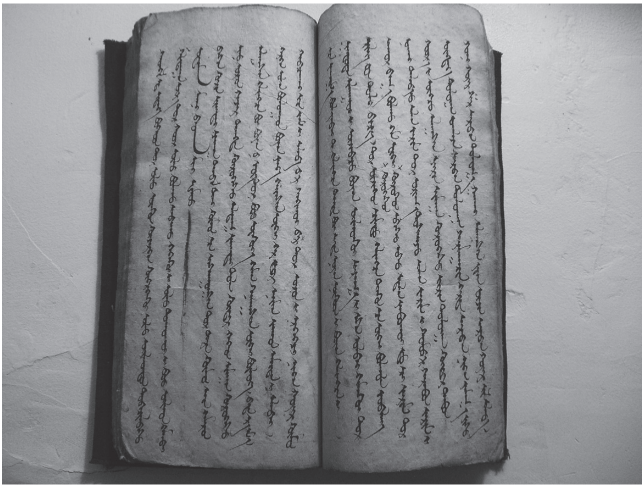


Figure 5.1 Manuscript written in the classical Mongolian in the form of a notebook.

for the Mongols. The largest preserved manuscript in the notebook format is a Mongolian translation of the fourteenth century, Chinese historical text, *Sūtra of the Yüan State*, which was translated into Mongolian in the nineteenth century by Demchigdorj (1863–1932) in 210 volumes. It is written with a Chinese writing brush and black ink on course Chinese *muutuu* paper and is presently held in the State Central Library in Ulaanbaatar.

The manuscripts folded in the shape of an accordion were primarily shorter prayers and *sādhana*, and the manuscripts in the format of a scroll were written in the classical Mongolian, Manchu, or Chinese language on Chinese coarse paper. Manuscripts written in the format of a scroll can be classified into two types: 1) shorter scroll texts, which are most commonly diplomas or awards made of cotton paper,[6] and 2) longer texts written on Chinese *muutuu* paper. Longer scroll books were made by gluing separate pages lengthwise and inserting a round stick at the end. When transported, scroll manuscripts were traditionally tied with saddle-thongs to a bag. As exemplified by the *Precious Summary* (*Erdeni-yin Tobchi*) written by the Ordos nobleman Saghang Sechen in 1662, the length of the scroll-type manuscript could extend up to four volumes. The preserved copy of the *Precious Summary* is written with blank ink on the *muutuu* paper measuring 71 m in length and 21 cm in width.

Writing tools and materials used in the production of Mongolian Buddhist manuscripts

The tools and material used for writing also varied in accordance with different writing methods and manuscripts' formats. The Mongols often referred to the four necessary writing implements they used in writing manuscripts—namely, the pen,

brush, paper, and ink—as the "four treasures" (*dörvön erdene*). The oldest writing tool in Mongolia was a wooden pen, which was later substituted by bamboo, reed, bone, bronze, and iron pens. From the end of the eighteenth century onward, the European pen came into use among the Kalmyk and Buryat Mongols. Owing to the use of a pen, the calligraphic penmanship with its contrast of thick and thin lines became standardized in the seventeenth century (Kara 2005: 213). Among the manuscripts written with pen in the aforementioned calligraphic form, there seems to be only one copy available, the Mongolian chronicle *Golden Summary* (*Altan Tobchi*) composed by the Buddhist State Preceptor (*güüshi*) Lubsangdanzin (Tib. Blo bzang bsTan 'dzin) in the mid-seventeenth century.

In addition to the pen, a Chinese writing brush[7] and a golden writing tool were also employed; however, a reed pen and a writing brush were most widely used. The practice of using a writing brush was maintained until 1929, when it was substituted by modern printing presses introduced by the People's Revolutionary Government. The methods of holding a pen or a brush differed from one region to another, and the use of different writing tools determined different traditional handwriting styles, which are said to be eight in number—namely, the so-called steady handwriting, line writing, cursive handwriting style, comb writing style, stretched out writing style, shorthand writing style, known also as folded writing, printed style, and honorific handwriting style. For example, a bamboo pen was deemed as appropriate for the steady and cursive handwriting styles, while a writing brush[8] was considered more suitable for the shorthand writing style. The type of pen tip or the thickness of a brush also influenced the writer's choice of handwriting style. Similarly, the thickness of a brush and the two prescribed manners of holding the brush—(1) one using two fingers: the thumb and index finger, and (2) the other using three fingers: the thumb, index and middle fingers—determined a style of writing.[9] The Mongolian tradition of writing the so-called "folded letters" (*evkhmel üseg*), in which the letters forming a word appear in the form of the drawing of a traditional Mongolian home (*ger*), a hat, a boot, a horseman, a flower, a bird, and so on, has been in use until today. This type of writing style has been especially utilized in writing short verses or decorative sentences placed at the edges of the texts written in the *sūtra* format.

The Mongols wrote their manuscripts with black and red cinnabar ink, with ink made of five, seven, or nine precious substances, with gold powder (Figure 5.2), and with multicolored silk threads embroidered in silken cloth. Occasionally, only the title of a book in the center of the cover page was embroidered with artistic stitching in which one needle and two threads were employed. At other times, the entire book was embroidered. One such book is a short text composed in Tibetan language and titled *Going for Refuge* (*sKyabs 'gro zhes bya ba bzhugs so*). It was embroidered with yellow thread on black, silken pages by the nineteenth-century artistic embroiderer Dojin of Ar Dolongöröövchin clan from Tüshet Khan *aimag*. The practice of embroidering the titles of books extended also to wood block printed books.

The material on which manuscripts were written varied; it ranged from birch bark, different kinds of paper, silken and cotton cloths to wooden and silver plates.

Although the Mongols themselves never wrote on palm leaves, they were familiar with such manuscripts and kept them in their possession. The State Central Library in Ulaanbaatar holds several manuscripts written on palm leaves and in the *rañjana* (*lan dza*) script. One of them is a copy of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, considered to be Nāgārjuna's legendary copy; and the other one contains the history of Śrī Laṅkā. The pages of these two palm leaf manuscripts are bound by two cords and are protected by illustrated wooden covers.

The dating of the Mongolian birch-bark manuscripts that were discovered in the twentieth century in the ruins of monasteries and *stūpas* within various regions of Mongolia suggests that writing on birch bark was in practice in Mongolia as early as the thirteenth century and as late as the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries.[10] The use of birch bark among the Mongols until such a late date resulted from the fact that for the Mongols residing in the northern part of the country, birch bark proved to be a durable and more suitable material for writing texts. Likewise, texts written on birch bark have been viewed by the Mongols as containing a greater spiritual value than those written on paper owing to the unprocessed and thereby undefiled quality of birch bark. Moreover, as attested by the find of the birch bark manuscripts in Kharbukhyn Balgas, in the later centuries, birch bark was frequently used for writing small size texts that were convenient to carry.

In 1930, on the eastern shore of the Ijil River, a group of farmers found the oldest Mongolian birch-bark manuscript, known as the "Birch-bark Manuscript of the Golden Horde." It was most likely written in the latter part of the thirteenth century and is presently in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. This manuscript contains fifty-five fragmented pages of the torn birch-bark. Several lines are written in Uighur-Mongolian, and few small chips containing only two words indicate the fact that some of its parts were written in the 'Phags pa square-script. In 1970, a large collection of the birch bark manuscripts dating from the first half of the seventeenth century and written in the Mongolian and Tibetan languages was discovered within a partially destroyed *stūpa* in the ruins of the town of Kharbukhyn Balgas during the Mongol-Soviet archeological expedition. The fact that the collection contains one thousand items, most of which are written in the Mongolian language, evidences a widespread usage of birch bark as writing material in the seventeenth century. These manuscripts represent the most important collection discovered after those excavated from the interior of the *stūpa* in Olon Süme in southern Mongolia by Japanese archeologist Namio Egami in 1937 and dated to the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries. Both collections consist of old, used books and fragments, most of which were partially burnt, suggesting that the *stūpas* in which they were found were either their burial places or that these texts were burnt and placed inside the *stūpas* during the ritual of a *stūpa* consecration.

Moreover, in June of 1999, in the ruins of a *stūpa* discovered in the place called Tavagchiin Khan located in Bökhmörön *sum* of Uvs *aimag* was excavated an ancient Buddhist manuscript of uncertain date, written with red cinnabar and black ink on birch bark, consisting of approximately eighty pages and dated to the period no later than the sixteenth century.

From Korean sources, we know that manuscript production in Mongolia was already carried out on a large scale in the early thirteenth century. The Korean historical texts indicate that in between 1221–1260, Korea exported to Mongolia large quantities of horse hide for book covers, 3,000 rolls of fine silk made of 1,000 threads, 200 bundles of strings for tying manuscript leaves, and 100,000 leaves of paper (Narantuya 2002: 131).[11] The production of Buddhist texts in Mongolia flourished especially from the sixteenth century onward, when the Mongols began to produce paper themselves. Until the sixteenth century, Buddhist texts in Mongolia continued to be written on wooden plates although the paper was in usage since the early thirteenth century. The Mongols produced different kinds of paper by various methods. They produced white paper from white feather grass (*Achnatherum*), which used to grow in the Tsant region of Daarkhan Uul *aimag* and in the region close to the White Lake (Tsagaan Nuur) that abounded in many small channels of water. They also produced paper from willow leaves at the confluence of Orkhon and Selenge rivers and brownish paper from *Stellera* plant (Figure 5.4).[12] Paper and ink were also produced by *lamas* in monasteries such as those of Arvaikheriin Üizen and Önö Öglöt.

In accordance with the Mongols' pastoral culture, a large size paper whose length ranged from 2–12 meters and that was cut in the *sūtra*-format[13] has been called a "horse paper," and a small size paper has been referred to as a "sheep paper." The Mongols also developed their own technique of producing a composite paper (*bolgoson tsaas*) made by sticking thin pages together in order to make them suitable for writing texts with heavy ink made of precious substances such as gold, silver, and the like. They have been producing a composite paper by using the fine flour paste and juice extracted from the flower of an orchid family. Once a composite paper was produced, it was then frequently painted with oily black paint made from an animal's raw brain, the soot of birch bark, and yellow glue. Although black color was most commonly used in painting a composite paper, various other colors were also utilized—namely, red, yellow, blue, and green.

Mongols' production of paper facilitated the proliferation of Buddhist literature in both printed and manuscript forms. Reportedly, in seventeenth-century Khalkha, there were about 700 publishing houses, which belonged to large monasteries and printed hundreds of thousands of Buddhist texts. These publishing houses employed a xylographic technique, which had certain drawbacks. Carving wooden boards required a considerable amount of time and effort, and in the course of time, printing boards either broke or wore out. Since the boards could be used to publish only more of the same texts, printing activities were not conducive to the production of original works. On account of the these limitations, monks continued to write their original works by hand, and monastic scribes painstakingly copied Buddhist texts, some of which contained as many as 300–400 pages. It is estimated that regardless of the proliferation of printed publications during that period, about thirty percent of texts were handwritten, and many others were engraved in wood, metal, and stone, and embroidered in multicolored threads on silk.

The Russian ethnographer Aleksei M. Pozdneyev, who visited Mongolia's capital Urga in the late nineteenth century, reported in his book *Mongolia and the Mongols* that at the time of his visit, numerous printing plates had been lost or broken, while others had been defaced through use so that the most of the Urga *Kanjur* was almost nonexistent. Although poor monasteries in Khalkha continued to purchase the *Kanjur*, they had to supply the missing portions by hand (Pozdneyev 1971: vol. 1, 63). Moreover, a practice of copying texts by hand continued to flourish especially among Mongolian literate *lamas* in the countryside, as printeries and printed books were not easily accessible and affordable to nomads. Likewise, copying a text by hand or commissioning such a text has been valued as a greatly meritorious, religious practice. Since the proliferation of the Buddhist literary culture and religious practice of copying manuscripts created a great demand for writing material, the Mongols continued to import the paper, brush, and ink from China, Tibet, Korea, and Russia despite their own ability to produce them.

In the period between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, the most venerated *mahāyāna-sūtras* and *tantras* were commonly handwritten on black paper with gold and silver and with ink of colors made of the five, seven, or nine precious substances such as pounded gold, silver, coral, pearl, turquoise, lapis lazuli, mother-of-pearl, tannin, and copper.

A production of manuscripts written with the nine types of ink made of nine precious substances required a specialized knowledge of the particular aspects of metallurgy and mineralogy; and the Mongols learned how to utilize two different methods in preparing these types of ink. One such method consists of grinding silver, gold, copper, and tannin separately, placing them into the metal bowl containing water and allowing them to settle. Afterwards, having purified the mixture by heating, one separates the fine dust of each ingredient, pounds the coral, pearl, turquoise, and mother-of-pearl separately in an iron mortar, strains them through a sieve with holes having the width of a fine needle, and then pulverizes them until a flour-like constituency is obtained. Having done so, one puts each of the precious substances into separate containers, mixes them with water containing borax, and only then is one ready to write.

Scribes living in a pastoral environment more commonly used inexpensive and easy to find materials for the preparation of ink such as a soot made of burned birch bark mixed with sap of pine resin, a soot of *Lycoperdon* mixed with boiled water of pine hairs, or an ink made of a brownish substance contained in the intermediary areas of the horse's muscles, and so on.

Preserved detailed instructions for the diverse methods of preparing black ink in the condensed liquid form or in the form of a hardened stick suggest that a writer or a scribe had to have specialized training in the craft of ink making. This implies that scribes were proficient in more areas than in mere penmanship and that the quality of a manuscript depended as much on the quality of material used in writing as on a writer's handwriting. In part, it is due to this versatile training of a professional scribe that well trained scribes were held in high regard by Mongolian society and that certain scribes were given important posts in the state

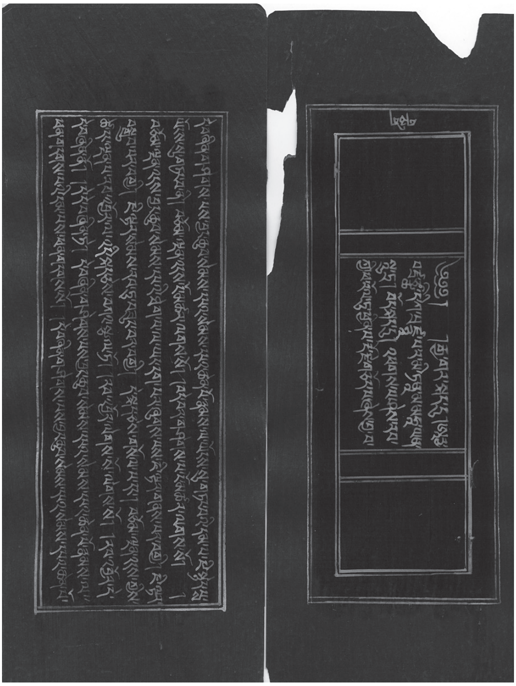


Figure 5.2 The *Vajracchedikā Sūtra* written in Tibetan language with golden ink on black paper.

and monastic administrations. Monastic and state scribes had their own guilds, headed by the chief scribe called the "great scribe" (*ikh bicheech*) and the "high commissioner" (*ikh zaragch*). The names of the eighty-five outstanding scribes from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who worked in different regions of Khalkha, have been handed down and honored to this day. Their titles indicate that they were men of high social ranks and learning, belonging to the hereditary Mongolian nobility such as *gün* ("baron"), *taij* (aristocrat descending from Chinggis Khan's lineage), and *beis* ("duke"), working as banner officials (*meeren, zakhiragch*), or bearing the titles given only to the men of literary abilities (*khurts*) (Batbayar 2001: 72–3). Some among these scribes, like Adiyaagiin Dashnyam from Da Khüree and Dashnyam from Setsen Khan's *aimaig*, were famous for their abilities to write exceptionally fast or to write while riding a horse without making a single typographical error (Batbayar 2001: 66–8).

In schools for scribes, young scribes often practiced writing on ash-boards, which were of two kinds: (1) the heavy, wooden ash-boards having multiple pages and similar to wooden books and (2) those having leather supported by a quadrangular frame. Boards also varied in their sizes and weight. The experienced scribes working on xylographic copies usually wrote texts on ash-boards

before writing them down on paper; and when comparing different copies of a single text, they also first wrote their corrections on ash-boards and then recorded them on the manuscript paper. Ash-boards were in common use in Mongolia until 1920.

Furthermore, the instructions for making ink also reveal a practice of adding flower essences and spices to the other necessary ingredients for making ink was frequently used for the sake of perfuming ink. For the Mongols, the use of costly, precious substances and scented ink in preparing manuscripts was not only an expression of one's respect and devotion for the given text, but also a means of enhancing the spiritual power and commercial value of the text. At times, such manuscripts were used as collateral for small loans. It has been said that a copy of the text written in cinnabar was considered 108 times more valued and beneficial than one written in black ink; while one written in silver was seen as 108 times better than one written in cinnabar. Similarly, a copy written in gold was considered 108 times more efficacious than one written in silver; and a copy written in ink made of seven precious substances was deemed 108 more powerful than one written in gold (Pozdneyev 1887: 178). This view is still prevalent among contemporary Mongolian Buddhists as attested by the fact that monasteries set higher prices for requested readings of the texts written with silver, gold, and other precious substances than for reading the same texts written with black ink.

The current view of the spiritual efficacy and commercial value of such manuscripts has inspired their new production in Mongolia and made them a valued commodity available for purchase in the growing number of shops selling Buddhist ritual items and other paraphernalia. They are given the honorary place in a home and are often shown with pride to guests. These texts are invariably copied or printed in their Tibetan versions, and only very few among lay people can read them. Nevertheless, people's faith in the miraculous power of the texts remains. The same can be said of some contemporary younger *lamas* who have recently began to engage in the work of copying Buddhist texts by hand. As one young monk from Gandentengchilin monastery in Ulaanbaatar stated during the interview I conducted with him, "it is the act of copying the text by hand itself that draws out spiritual powers of the text and enables one to receive its blessings."[14]

In addition to the previously mentioned types of paper, flat hammered silver plates with raised letters painted in gold were also implemented in the creation of costly manuscripts that perhaps today cannot be strictly defined as manuscripts. An example of such a text is the copy of the *Guhyasamājatantra*, produced at the end of the nineteenth century in Mandshir monastery and presented as a religious offering. About 52 kg of silver and 560 g of gold were used in producing its 222 pages of a flat-hammered silver with raised golden letters. The book also contains engraved images of Buddhas encrusted with diamonds, corals, and pearls.[15] The book is a testimony to the exquisite craftsmanship and artistic sensitivity that Mongols acquired as they embraced diverse branches of Buddhist fields of knowledge.

Aesthetic considerations in the production of Buddhist Manuscripts

If one looks at an attractive book,
The impurity of one's eyes will vanish.
If one reads a fine book,
The impurity of one's mind will subside.[16]

(Mongolian Proverb)

There is no doubt that manuscript production in Mongolia enhanced the development of crafts, calligraphy, and other creative arts, since it provided Mongolian calligraphers, artists, and craftsmen with an opportunity to express their artistic talent in creating aesthetically pleasing books. As in Tibet, a common practice among the Mongols was to embellish manuscripts of the *sūtra* format with glass and to decorate their cover pages, external title labels (*dondor*), wooden covers, curtains (*khöshig*), gowns (*barintag*), tying strings, pegs, and cases (*shogol*) made of wood or felt[17] by means of calligraphy, drawing, painting, engraving, embroidery, edging, and iron casting. The art of decoration also required the knowledge of the diverse methods of producing glue made of diverse ingredients and of various qualities—a glue made by boiling down meat, a glue mixed with blood, a white glue made of milk or made of the skin of a fish, a glue mixed with marine plants or mixed with sap of a tree, a glue made of the liver soot, or a good quality glue made by drying, pulverizing and boiling the *Astragalus* or orchid flowers.

The Mongols also developed their own independent artistic style of decorating wooden covers of *sudars*, called *zümber* ("design in relief" see Figure 5.3), which they also utilized in decorating the offering ritual tables, temple ceilings, and wooden temple pillars.[18] This practice of decorating Buddhist manuscripts and xylographs inspired by the Indian and Tibetan examples greatly contributed to the development of Mongolian arts and crafts.

The purpose of decorated Buddhist manuscripts was not only to impart knowledge, inspire faith, and give merit to the artist and the commissioning person,



Figure 5.3 A decorative wooden cover for a manuscript in the *poҫi* format.

but also to capture one's imagination and induce an aesthetic pleasure. Among Mongolian Buddhist manuscripts, one finds the illustrated Buddhist texts containing the miniature paintings of Buddhist deities that accompany the exultations of deities' virtues and edify illustrations and diverse types of elaborate decorative and complicated patterns. Some of the most commonly used patterns and images were undoubtedly borrowed from and inspired by traditional Chinese, Manchu, and Tibetan Buddhist imagery. Among such decorative patterns and images, the most common ones are the demon's horn-pattern, hammer-pattern, single and double swastika, the endless knot, various *vajras*, the arrow-head pattern, a dual coin pattern, double horn pattern, the images of clouds, water waves, flowers, leaves, birds, and two intertwined dragons.

The Mongols also produced illustrated manuscripts dealing with the topics of history, astrology, medicine, and philosophy. More interestingly, they also created manuscripts made as picture albums that illustrate the activities of famous Buddhist personages. Among such manuscripts, the most noteworthy are the *Xuanzang's Record of the Travel to the West* (*Tansan lamyn baruun etgeeded zorchson temdeglel*), and *A Biography of Nāgārjuna* (*Nagarjunain Namtar*), which was created by an eighteenth century artist in the format of a *sudar* consisting of the fifty-five cotton pages painted with mineral pigment and gold.[19] Among picture albums there are also those made in the format of a notebook and illustrating biographies of the famous Chinese monks Hva-shang and Tangsan (Xuanzang)—namely, the *Biographical Pictures of Ji Dyan Hva-shang* (*Ji Dyan Khuushaany Namtryn Zurag*), which contains 240 pages and 120 sections, and the *Illustrations of the History of Tang San Lama of the Period of Taizong Khan of the Tang Dynasty* (*Tan ulsyn Taisun khaany üeiin Tan San lamyn tüükhin zurag*), which contains 200 pages measuring 27 × 53.5 cm.

Mongol khans and nobility favored the commissioning of Buddhist texts written with the previously mentioned precious substances, as they saw this as a merit-making act capable of protecting their lands and people from natural disasters and keeping enemies at bay.[20] Commissioning Buddhist manuscripts also helped promote the image of Mongol khans as ideal rulers, whose fierce, martial side is balanced by a refined, cultural, and circumspect side. Among the copies of the *Kanjur* and individual *sūtras* commissioned by Mongolian khans and noblemen, the following five are worth mentioning:

1. Two manuscript versions of the golden *Kanjur*
2. The *Kanjur* written in Tibetan with ink made of seven precious substances and consisting of 108 volumes
3. The golden manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* written in Mongolian and containing 356 pages measuring 17 × 53.5 cm[21]
4. The copy of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* written in four volumes with ink made of nine precious substances
5. The smallest, preserved version of the *Guhyasamājatantra*, which consists of ten pages measuring 2.3 × 5.8 cm with the text on both sides of a page.

The golden manuscript version of the *Kanjur* that was produced in the nineteenth century and belonged to the private collection of the Fifth Bodgo Gegeen is now held in the library of Gandantegchinling monastery in Ulaanbaatar. Another golden copy written on black paper consists of 101 volumes and is in the Mongolian State Central Library. Its pages measure 64 × 21 cm and contain nine lines each. The title page has two engraved Buddhist images made of gold and measuring 16.5 × 9.0 × 1.8 cm.

The colophon to the golden manuscript copy of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* mentions Namsraijav as its scribe. A copy of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* written with nine precious substances and measuring 32 × 91 cm was written during the reign of Enkh-Amgalan Khan (1662–1722). It belonged to the private collection of the Eighth Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu and was taken from there to the State Central Library in 1924.

While the aforementioned, golden manuscript copies of the *Kanjur* remind us of the past glory of the Mongol khans and Mongolian Buddhism, they do not contribute to the linguistic or orthographical study of the Mongolian Buddhist canon, since they are written in Tibetan language. In contrast, the older manuscripts written in the Mongolian language and produced with inexpensive ink and paper can be of greater value to a scholar of the Mongolian language-based Buddhist literature. They shed light on the history of translation in Mongolia and on the development of a Buddhist terminological system in the Mongolian language. Translation of the Tibetan *bKa 'gyur* into Mongolian took place over a period of four centuries. In consequence, its texts contain linguistic features of different periods and amalgamate the old orthographical and grammatical forms with the newly established ones. A good example is the manuscript copy the Mongolian *Kanjur* preserved in 76 volumes, which was compiled in 113 volumes upon the completion of its translation in 1629 and is currently kept in the State Central Library in Ulaanbaatar.

The practice of writing Buddhist texts with gold could have been already present among the Mongols in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is mentioned in the thirtieth volume of the *Sūtra of the Yüan State* (fourteenth century) that the Tibetan *bKa 'gyur*, the Uighur-Mongolian version of one thousand-volume book of the *Āyur* Buddha, and one million other Buddhist texts written in golden letters were already in existence by that time (Narantuya 2002: 170).

The preservation and veneration of Buddhist manuscripts

> They dress themselves in cotton and sheepskin clothing,
> They dress their offspring in sheepskin,
> But they honor and wrap their books in silk.
> This custom of my Mongolian people is too good![22]
>
> (The Mongolian nationalist and poet, T. Galsan)

The systematic and large-scale destruction of Buddhist texts during the communist purges in Mongolia was a great blow to the preservation of Buddhist manuscripts.

As happened in other communist, totalitarian regimes, the first victims of the repression of expression in Mongolia were religious texts. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the estimated four million books that are now stored in the State Central Library in Ulaanbaatar consists of Buddhist manuscripts. According to Ganjav Gansukh, the officer in charge of the "Exhibition of Rare and Valuable Books" in the State Central Library, more than one million of the stored books are ancient Buddhist texts composed in Mongolian, Tibetan, Manchu, and Sanskrit, which are now endangered by their environment. Large amounts of dust caused by the dry climate, together with a lack of moisture-control equipment in the library's storage facilities, cause the erosion of the manuscripts' sheets, changes in the color of cinnabar, and other forms of decay. While a laboratory of the Central State Library has the capacity to restore modern publications and up to eight hundred books a year, it lacks a capability necessary for the preservation of old Buddhist manuscripts.

Buddhist manuscripts have been preserved in part due to Mongolia's dry climate and in part due to the Mongols' reverence for books. In the Mongolian language, the word *nom*, which was inherited from the Sogdian *nmw* through Uighur,[23] designates both the Buddha Dharma and a book, implying the Mongols' nondifferentiating view of the two. The second line in the opening, salutary words found at the beginning of many Mongolian Buddhist texts, which reads: "I pay homage to Dharma (*nom*),"[24] implies one's homage to both, Dharma and the book. The Mongols' reverence for Buddhist scriptures is also expressed in their texts of dedication to different Buddhist *sūtras* and in texts prescribing the methods of worshipping *sūtras*, making offerings to them, and giving them alms as if they were living sagely ascetics. As previously mentioned in this paper, the majority of handwritten texts in Mongolia were the *mahāyāna-sūtras*, *tantras*, and *dhāraṇīs* that were widely worshipped by the Mongols and that promised an abundance of merit to those who copied them. For example, the following words of the short Mongolian text titled *A Summary of the Āiyursūtra or Āiyurjñāna* (*Khutagt Tseden-ish Buyu Tsend-Ayush Khemeekh Sudryn Khuraangui Orshvoi*), echo the promissory declarations found in almost all *mahāyāna-sūtras* and related texts:

> If any sentient being in Jambudvīpa writes this book that well describes limitless life, wisdom, realization, and praises, and if one makes others write it, if one merely hears its name, reads and prints it, holds it in one's hands, or worships it with offerings of *tsa-tsa*, incense, rosary, perfume, and *enkhmel* flower, one's good realizations will become limitless
>
> (Tüvdenvanchüg 2004: 207–8).

One of the later testimonies to the Mongols' honoring of Buddhist scriptures is a granite monument dedicated to a copy of the Mongolian *Tanjur*,[25] which in the course of time was handed down to the temple of the banner prince of the first rank Nayant Chakhar of Khalkha's Sain Noyen Khan *aimag*, who reportedly

belonged to the Golden Clan of Chinggis Khan. An inscription on the lower corner of the backside of the monument gives the name of its creator, a member of the Literary Committee by the name Naidangiin Dendev (1891–1960).[26] The monument consists of three parts: the base, crown, and the main stele, which are mutually connected with a stone peg. It measures 248 cm in height and on its upper right and left corners one can see the engraved seal of the Literary Committee. In accordance with the agreement made in 1924 by the first president of the Literary Committee, the nobleman O. Jamiyan, with the banner prince Nayant, the *Tanjur* was brought to Mongolia's capital from Sain Noyen Khan's *aimag* in 1925. The agreement consisted of nine points pertaining to the responsibilities of the Literary Committee in keeping the *Tanjur* safe and to the manner in which it should be stored. With the approval of Jamiyan, this agreement was engraved on the stele.

In Mongolian Buddhist culture, a Buddhist text stands for the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. The instructions pertaining to the manner in which one should compose or copy a Buddhist text attest to this fact. The guidelines demonstrate that the act of writing is to be approached as a form of the contemplative, *sādhana* practice of constructing a textual *maṇḍala* (Narantuya 2002: 177).

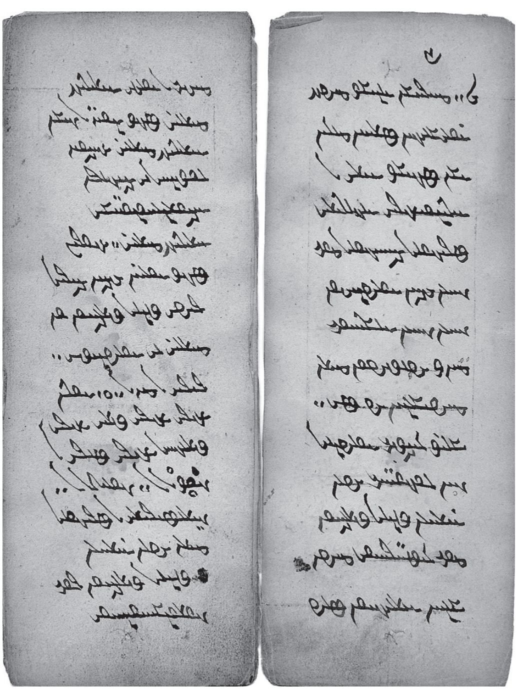


Figure 5.4 Pages from a short *sādhana* on the perfection of wisdom written in the classical Mongolian with black ink on brown paper made from *Stellera*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one could say that a prolific production of manuscripts in Mongolia, which benefited from Mongols' relations with other nations, also assisted in a small way the economy of those nations by importing a writing supply that was in a high demand due to its insufficient production in Mongolia itself. Likewise, while the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia facilitated a proliferation of Buddhist manuscripts in both handwritten and xylographic forms and a flourishing of Mongolian arts and crafts, it was in turn greatly enriched by them. The archival records of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Government from 1926 show that at that time there were 255 registered silversmiths, 297 blacksmiths, 590 wood carvers, and eighty-five tailors and embroiders in Mongolia, which had during that period a relatively small population (Narantuya 2002: 209). In the modern era of new and inexpensive printing and copying technologies and computer programs that provide the unprecedented means of artistic creativity, it remains to be seen to what degree the production of handwritten Buddhist manuscripts in Mongolia will evolve. However, the degree and range of influence that manuscript production has had on the preservation of Buddhism and on the development of diverse aspects of Mongolian culture from the early thirteenth century until the early twentieth century can be seen not only from historical sources and preserved national treasures but also from contemporary religious practices and artistic expressions that reflect traditional forms even after seventy years of their interruption.

Notes

1 *Khelsen üg khiisne*
Bichsen üg üldene.
2 Walther Heissig, Elisabetta Choido, N. N. Poppe, Johan Elverskog, for example.
3 The Mongols were introduced to xylographic printing through their contact with China in the second half of the thirteenth century, and they utilized it until the early twentieth century. Wooden blocks for printing were commonly used, but copper plates were occasionally used as well.
4 Throughout the different periods in the history of their Buddhist literary culture the Mongols utilized the following types of Mongolian scripts: Uighur-Mongolian, 'Phags pa script (thirteenth century), Clear script (seventeenth century), Soyombo Script (seventeenth century), Horizontal Quadratic script (seventeenth century), Vagindra script (twentieth century), and Cyrillic (twentieth century).
5 These manuscripts were made in the format of a notebook by sewing together the left sides of the pages.
6 The scroll format was most commonly used for awards by Mongolian and Manchu khans' and for khans ordinances.
7 A writing brush was made of hair and its handle of Club-rush (*Spiraea*).
8 A writing brush was considered as suitable for writing *sūtras*, as it would tire the writer's hand less than a pen. It was of different sizes, depending on the size of a *sūtra*: big, small, thick, and narrow.
9 The method of holding a brush with the thumb and index finger was used for a cursive handwriting style and for condensed writing. The method of holding a brush with three fingers was used for holding a thick brush used in calligraphy.

10 In 1920, J. Tseveen discovered several *sūtras* written in the classical Mongolian script on a birch bark in the graves in the Tamir Basin. In the 1960s, several birch bark manuscripts of Oirat Mongols from the eighteenth century were discovered in Uzbekistan. In 1993, restoration of the birch bark manuscripts started in cooperation with the German team of restorers from the Central Asian Seminar at Bonn University.

11 Koreans learned how to make paper in the seventh century; and in the eleventh century, they began exporting paper to China.

12 In order to use *Stellera* plant for making paper, they had first to boil it, harden it on the sun, and pound it in an iron mortar until it became like flour.

13 "Horse paper" measured, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, or 12 m.

14 M. Batchuluun, August 13, 2006.

15 The measurements of its pages are 73.8 × 21.9 cm, and their thickness is 2.3 cm. The *Vajracchedikā*, which was another text that was venerated by the Mongols as much as the *Guhyasamāja*, was also made of gold letters on thirty-two white silver plates. Both books are now kept in the State Central Library in Ulaanbaatar.

16 *Saikhan nomyg kharval nüdnii gem arilna.*
Sain nomyg unshval setgeliin gem sarnina.

17 The practice of storing a Buddhist text in a case for the sake of protecting the book and keeping the pages together has been widely used among the Mongols since the seventeenth century. Wooden cases were commonly made of local timber and sometimes of imported bamboo and sandalwood. They were usually painted in brownish color. Their outer side would be decorated by means of engraving, painting, or stitching various patterns. Cases made of felt were sewn and decorated by various patterns.

18 The method of making a design in relief has the following sequence. Having mixed sugar and water containing glue with pulverized porcelain or with powdered marble stone, one mixes these ingredients until they become a thick paste similar to cream. One draws a design by letting the paste flow from a special, thin and pointy tube similar to that used in making sand *maṇḍalas*. Afterwards, one paints the drawing with very thick ink that hardens the paste. Furthermore, having mixed dried up fat, white porcelain powder or marble sand with paint of different colors, one writes and draws by letting the mixture drip from a tube. The raised and gold painted letters and images are separated from their background that is painted in black, blue, and red. A design that is made in this way appears like a fine engraving.

19 The size of the manuscript is 34.5x13.5 cm. It is now kept in the private collection of A. Altangerel in Ulaanbaatar.

20 Buyant Khan commissioned the golden *Kanjur* in 1318, Gegeen Khan commissioned one in 1340, and Ligdan Khan commissioned one in 1629.

21 Among the manuscripts of the *sūtras* written with golden letters, this is the largest text. Its colophon mentions two noblemen Purevjav and Amarlingui as persons who commissioned the copy and names Namsranjav as its scribe.

22 *Öörsdöö daalimba khödös ömsdög,*
Ür achaa nekhiid ölgiiddög,
Nomyg kharin torgoor barintaglaj deedledeg.
Mongol tümnii miny zanshil daan ch öödrög.

23 The Sogdian *nwm* is related to the Greek *nomos*, coming from the root meaning a "law." The word *nom* was originally used by Sogdians and Uighurs to denote the Buddha Dharma.

24 *Burqan-dur mörgümüi.*
Nom-dur mörgümüi.
Bagsi-dur mörgümüi.

25 It was created in honor of the *Tanjur* copy consisting of 226 volumes with pages measuring 13.8 × 23 cm.

26 N. Dendev studied the classical Mongolian script since age nine and served as a scribe assisting his teacher Galsan in teaching the Mongolian and Manchu scripts. In 1911, he became a notable scribe in the cabinet of the State's Ministry, and from 1921 he began to work for the Literary Committee and the central museum. In order to learn the technique of engraving and repairing stone, Dendev became a student of the Chinese stonemason Shojoon Bayansan.

6 From words to books

Indian Buddhist manuscripts in the first millennium CE

Jens-Uwe Hartmann

The earliest transmission

Dating and establishing chronologies for Buddhist manuscripts from ancient India pose problems in ways that differ from those associated with the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean and the Near East. Two chronologies exist for the Buddha, one assigning his death to the first quarter of the fifth century BCE, the other about a hundred years later to the fourth (cf. Bechert 1991–97); more precise dates are not available. Except for the still undeciphered Indus Valley Script of the third and second millennia BCE, there is no evidence of writing in India prior to the third century BCE, and the oldest presently known manuscripts date from the first century CE, as we will see in the following section. This indicates an oral transmission of the Buddha's teachings for at least a hundred years and probably for a much longer period. The initial orality is also reflected in the semihistorical reports preserved in the various Buddhist traditions. In the Theravāda, the Buddhism of Sri Lanka and South East Asia, this development is described as collecting and structuring orally transmitted pieces: a few months after the death of the Buddha, his words, hitherto preserved in individual discourses, were recited by eminent monks and then collected in order to establish and confirm them as the "authentic" message of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*). They were arranged according to a structured scheme of classification, which was the system of the Tripiṭaka—the "Three Baskets," and from then on faithfully transmitted within groups or schools of reciters. For several centuries, the transmission remained oral, until it was decided to adopt the medium of writing and to preserve and transmit the Tripiṭaka not only through learning it by heart, but also through writing it down. This is how the Theravāda presents the transmission of the word of the Buddha, and the reports of other Buddhist schools, although differing in many points, agree at least with regard to the structured collection of oral discourses.[1] For all we know, this picture is, at least in part, not likely to be true.

First of all, the diversity of the surviving versions of the scriptures does not support the idea of an early redaction of something like a canon, be it in the form of a Tripiṭaka or in some other arrangement. In fact, there are traces of at

least one different and probably older arrangement of texts preserved in the scriptures themselves. This arrangement knows of nine or twelve genres that are differentiated by formal criteria as, e.g., verse and prose, and by contents (Hinüber 1994). It rules out the idea of the Tripiṭaka as the first and only device for collecting single texts into a structured whole. Contrary to the oral transmission of the Vedic texts, which aimed at faithful preservation of the exact wording and for this purpose needed very precise structures, the Buddhists took considerably less interest in the wording and rather tried to preserve ideas and contents, admitting all sorts of redactional changes and developments both on the verbal and on the dogmatic level.

The adoption of writing

We do not really know when and why the Buddhists started to write down their sacred texts, or at least we do not know when and why they did it in India. We do, however, have a very interesting, although very brief, account of the date of and the reason for the beginning of writing among the Buddhists in Sri Lanka. As mentioned in the beginning, India appears to have been one of the last civilizations in the world to adopt the art of writing. The oldest documents are stone inscriptions from the third century BCE, and there is no evidence of an earlier use of writing.[2] This seems inconceivable in view of the huge amount of literature that was produced in India before that date, all the more so as part of this literature—for instance, the works on grammar—is already extremely sophisticated. It is exactly the sophisticated nature of some of this literature that is often used as a counterargument against the hypothesis of such a late invention of writing (cf. Falk 1993: 266f. and Salomon 1998a: 13). Be that as it may, even after its introduction, writing does not seem to have played a major role in cultural developments, and the Buddhists may have been counted among the first to write books and thereby put writing to use for purposes other than administration, imperial concerns, or inscriptions. The oldest Indian manuscripts are Buddhist, and the earliest among them date from the first or second centuries CE (cf. Allon et al. 2006).

Sri Lanka has been mentioned as the only source of any information on the beginning of writing among the followers of the Buddha. Sinhala Buddhists started at an early date to record historical and semihistorical information in so-called chronicles, the oldest of which—the *Dīpavaṃsa*—was composed not long after 350 CE.[3] These chronicles mention that the monks (*bhikkhu*s) wrote down the Tipiṭaka in Sri Lanka for the first time in the first century BCE, but the very short passage, consisting of only two verses, does not provide details of that Tipiṭaka or of the commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*). This famous and oft-quoted passage reads:

> Before this time, wise bhikkhus had orally handed down the text of the three Piṭakas and also the Aṭṭhakathā. At this time, the bhikkhus who perceived the decay of created beings assembled and in order that the Religion

might endure for a long time, they recorded (the above-mentioned texts) in written books.

(Bechert 1992: 45)

This is said to have occurred during the reign of King Vaṭṭagāmaṇi Abhaya who ruled in the first century BCE. Various political and natural disasters occurred during his reign: a rebellion, a great famine, the second Tamil invasion of Sri Lanka and conflicts in the Sangha, the order of the Buddhist monks. According to the commentaries on the passage quoted above, there was a risk that parts of the scriptures were lost due to the death of the monks who had memorized them (cf. Hinüber 1990: 63f.). This is a very important point. Buddhism developed a wide range of ideas about its own irreversible decline and final disappearance, and one indication for this process of decline is the gradual loss of the scriptures (cf. Nattier 1992). As long as the scriptures are preserved, the inevitable decline is at least postponed. This appears to have been an important reason for writing down the texts, a reason also indicated by the specific wording of the passage (*ciraṭṭhitthaṃ dhammassa*), which is often employed in connection with concepts of decline. The wording of the passage appears to presuppose an already well-structured canon with commentary; although the actual canon is impossible to reconstruct, the writing down of the scriptures, such as during the reign of Vaṭṭagāmaṇi Abhaya, is generally taken as a historical fact (Bechert 1992: 52).

As mentioned before, this is the only information on a date of and a reason for writing down the sacred texts. More reasons are easily conceivable, but the Buddhists did not record them, or such records, if they ever existed, are not preserved.

The art of writing

During the first century CE, Buddhist books were written in two completely different scripts, Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī.[4] The first one, Brāhmī, and specifically the Kuṣāṇa-Brāhmī named after the empire in which it was used, is the script from which subsequent indigenous Indian scripts developed. Along with Hinduism and Buddhism, writing was a major cultural invention exported from India to Central and Southeast Asia. Thus, the scripts used in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia were derived from South Indian alphabets. In Tibet, the script was modeled after a North Indian alphabet. Even in Central Asia, along the Silk Road, several ethnic groups, among them the Tocharians, the Khotanese, and to a certain extent even the Uighurs, also used a northern form of Brāhmī for writing their languages. Brāhmī is written, like Latin, from left to right. The other script is the so-called Kharoṣṭhī, written from right to left, used only in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent and in Central Asia, and only up to the fourth or fifth century, when it fell out of use and into oblivion.

As material for books, palm leaf was used from the very beginning in India and birch bark in the northwest of the subcontinent. Palm leaves necessitated

a certain format: the resulting pages were long and narrow and varied in length, but not in width. In contrast, birch bark allowed for various formats, because its width was not as limited as that of palm leaves, and several pieces could be pasted or stitched together. The scroll, which could reach several meters in length, was a format Buddhists in the northwest characteristically used during the first centuries CE. However, the preference for the scroll seemed to be linked to a particular language, namely Gāndhārī, and to a specific script, namely Kharoṣṭhī, both of which had been used for some time by the school of the Dharmaguptakas. Only a few examples of scrolls survived that were written exclusively in Brāhmī script for what were most likely ritual purposes. When Kharoṣṭhī fell out of use, the format of the scroll also disappeared from the record. For several centuries, the format prefigured by the palm leaf became the only model for a book, regardless of the material used for its production, such as palm leaf, birch bark, paper—as in Central Asia under Chinese influence—or even precious metal, such as gold. Such a book consisted of separate pages that were turned over on the upper edge in order to read the reverse side. A bundle of loose pages was usually held together by a string. For a long time, and in Sri Lanka up to the present, the pages had one or two string holes that allowed for tight fastening. In northwest India and Central Asia, the string hole was gradually reduced until it is only symbolically represented and eventually disappeared.

In the early centuries, Buddhist books were apparently not intended as art objects. There were no illustrations or illuminations, the ink was black, and there was no variation in color. No lines were drawn and there was no graphic delimitation of the space used for writing. Only one phenomenon had a certain function within the text and allowed for decorative variation: this was a circle that was also occasionally used to indicate the end of a text. Until the seventh century, this was the only means of decorating a manuscript, at least in northern India,[5] as there were no surviving examples from the southern regions of the subcontinent. Prior to the seventh century, script was seemingly not employed for decorative purposes. From the first and second centuries until the seventh, early examples of book script developed rapidly, without, however, leading to a growing appreciation of calligraphy and the ornamental possibilities of writing. This seems to be confirmed by the relatively minor importance generally accorded to writing in Indian culture where the art of memorizing long texts and the admiration for the specialist who mastered such a feat existed alongside of the art of writing. Only in the seventh century CE, with the introduction of a script variously called Gilgit/Bamiyan type II or Proto-Śāradā, a sense for the aesthetic potential of script developed. This coincided with a change in the form of the pen and opened up new possibilities of differentiating between thick and thin strokes (cf. Sander 1968: 141ff. and plates 21–6).

After the turn of the millennium, this development culminated in the north with the emergence of scripts like the so-called Rañjana, which was so ornamental that it became rather difficult to read (cf. Sander 1968: plates 27–8). All of the observations apply only to the north of the subcontinent, where ink was used for writing. In the south, the script was not written with a pen, a feather or a brush,

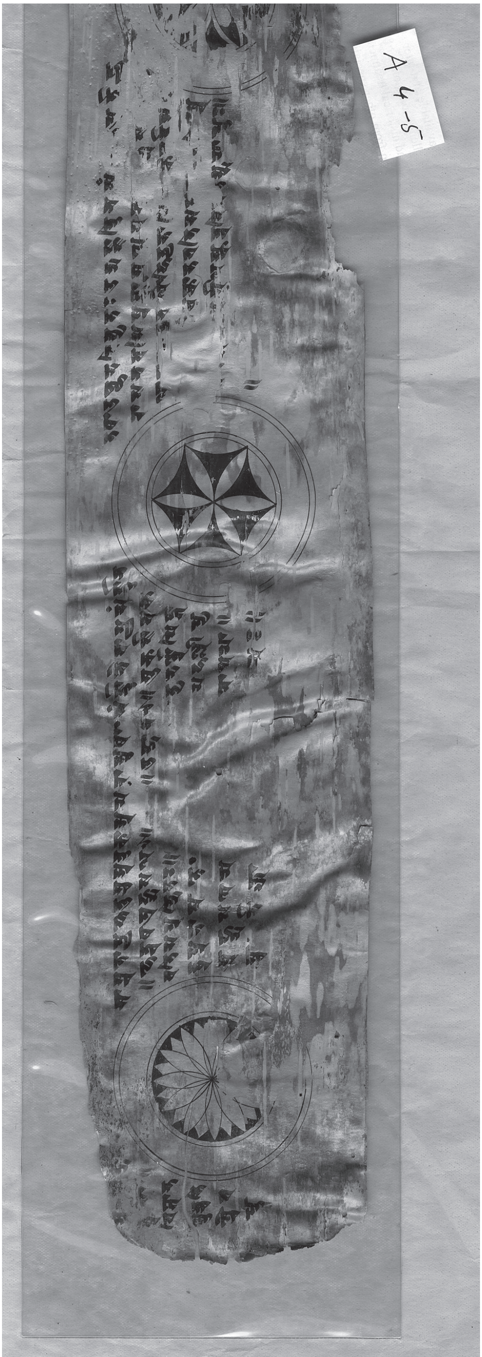


Figure 6.1 Left half of the final folio of the *Dīrghāgama* manuscript. (Photo courtesy of Jens-Uwe Hartmann.)

but engraved into a palm leaf with a metal stylus, leading to a rather different development that necessitated round shapes and did not differentiate between thin and thick strokes.

The art of book painting

Early manuscripts were not illuminated. This is perhaps surprising, since book painting was well known in the regions to the west of the Indian subcontinent. It has been pointed out that "[b]y the fourth century Christians in Asia Minor and Europe were illuminating their manuscripts, and by the sixth century Christians in Syria and Mesopotamia, as well as Iran, were supporting the many flourishing centers of illuminated book production. Further, Buddhists may have even earlier seen Greco-Roman illustrated books in Gandhāra and Bactria" (Pal et al. 1988: 11). In Gandhāra, a region in northern Pakistan, Buddhists drew extensively on Greco-Roman sculpture to create artistic expressions of their own gods, heroes, and saviors. If indeed they saw examples of illustrated books—and this is quite likely—they seemingly felt no need to imitate them. Manuscripts dating to the first centuries of CE do not readily strike us as beautiful. Beauty is, of course, nothing absolute, but a convention based at least in part on comparison. In that sense, a comparison of earlier manuscripts with later ones indicates that early producers spent less time thinking about the possibilities for decoration. The earliest examples of illuminated manuscripts in Indian scripts date to the end of the first millennium, and they do not come from India, but from Central Asia. The Petrovsky collection in St. Petersburg contains a paper leaf of a manuscript of the S*addharmapuṇḍarīka*, the *Lotus Sūtra*, one of the most famous discourses of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and this folio bears a colored painting.[6] The space for the illumination was left empty by the scribe, and the painting did not overlap with the writing. This suggests that the painting was contemporaneous with the script, and the script permits a dating. For paleographical reasons, Russian scholars tend to date the manuscript to the seventh century, but I question the likelihood of such an early date. While I am not a specialist of this variety of the Brāhmī script, which was developed in the southern part of Central Asia, in the region of Khotan, and we are still awaiting a paleographical handbook on this script, I am inclined to date this manuscript at least one or two centuries later.

Around the turn of the millennium, the first dated examples of book illuminations appeared in India. They were produced in the cultural sphere of the Pala-Sena dynasty (770–1205) that ruled mainly in Bihar and Bengal, and showed similar patterns of dividing a palm leaf into regular spaces. While the illustrations in the Central Asian manuscripts usually adopted the shape of a circle—probably based on the previously existing circle design—the Pala-Sena manuscripts preferred square illustrations. This format conveys a geometrical impression that is repeated in the rectangular letters of the script. Script and decoration together created a rather beautiful impression, and it is only then that Buddhist manuscripts became objects of aesthetic sentiment and art, so that the production of a masterpiece

required both a gifted scribe trained in calligraphy and a gifted painter (Pal et al. 1988: 79, 85).

Books as Ritual Objects

In March 2001, the Taliban decided to destroy the two gigantic Buddha statues carved into the rock of the Bamiyan valley in Afghanistan despite protests around the world and especially from Asian countries with large Buddhist populations. At present, UNESCO plans to rebuild them and a team of German specialists has begun the removal of the debris in order to identify larger pieces that may be used for the reconstruction of the two statues. Initial plans to employ heavy equipment like bulldozers were abandoned in order to select pieces from the debris by hand. In July 2006, the local workers found an unusual artifact in the niche of the smaller of the two Buddhas (Figure 6.2). The remains suggest that it may have been a simple kind of reliquary or a similar object, such as an amulet. Its original relation to the destroyed Buddha statue and its original storage location could not be reconstructed from the fragments of a small birch bark manuscript that had been wrapped in cloth and placed inside a cylindrical metal object.

The few fragments shown on the photograph offer a first hint at the text that the manuscript contains (Figure 6.3). The words *(ni)rodha* and *utpāda*, "destruction" and "origination" are visible and they are repeated in the other fragment next to it. These two words point to a well-known group of discourses by the Buddha, and a closer examination of some of the fragments confirms the identification. The main topic of these texts is *pratītyasamutpāda*, "dependent origination," an explanation of how the human state of ignorance and suffering comes about and how one can transcend it.[7] This explanation is given in a short and condensed formula that contains one of the most foundational teachings of the Buddha



Figure 6.2 Remains of an amulet (?) from Bamiyan.



Figure 6.3 The text fragments.

that is also closely connected to his awakening experience (cf. Bongard-Levin et al. 1996: 34–6). The content of the passage made it a good choice for using the manuscript fragment in a context in which a book became a visible representation of the Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha, and even represented the Buddha himself.[8] As such, the manuscript fragment symbolized meaning beyond its material form and, through its materiality, manifested a presence that was believed to be highly beneficial for the worshippers and extended its protection to the place that contained it.[9]

We do not know when written texts were first used in rituals, but it was an established practice by the middle of the first millennium. The best-known and most widespread example is probably the Tibetan formula, *ye dharmā*, which is also the shortest of its genre. This single stanza is linked closely to the other texts mentioned above; if the *sūtra*s about the *pratītyasamutpāda* doctrine can be considered a condensed form of the Buddha's most profound teachings, then the *ye dharmā* formula can be understood to represent a condensed version of the *sūtras*.[10]

Books used for such ritual and cosmological purposes no longer function only as a means for communicating their verbal contents. The text they contain represents an ultimate presence of the Buddha and his supernatural powers. It is no longer read; on the contrary, it is hidden, placed within a container, such as an amulet, reliquary, *stūpa*, Buddha image, or perhaps an altar. Since it symbolizes another reality, even a fragment of it can represent this function; this is illustrated in the Nagaropama-sūtra, one of the texts on the *pratītyasamutpāda* formula, which stands for the whole of the Buddha's teachings, and by the *ye dharmā* verse, which again may represent the Nagaropama-sūtra.[11] In other words, it is not the quantity

and, more irritatingly for modern scholars, it is not the philological completeness of the text that brings about the desired effects of protection. Texts may be incomplete and still represent the whole of the Dharma.

An important ritual function of books that is separate from communicating the immediate content of a manuscript concerns the religious merit or *puṇya* generated by copying or reciting them. We do not know when and where this practice was first employed, but it is evident that only books that contain the word of the Buddha, or texts, which are generally subsumed under such categories as "canon," were used in this manner. This ritual notion may be linked to ideas similar to those discussed above concerning the information on the earliest written form of the Tipiṭaka in Sri Lanka. Copying prevents loss; loss potentially means the decline of the *buddhadharma* and, consequently, the disappearance of the means for salvation. Therefore, copying is seen as beneficial, and combined with the idea that the written word of the Buddha may also represent his presence and his power, copying is a beneficial act of merit in itself. In East Asia, these ideas led to the development and application of printing within Buddhist circles. Among the oldest examples of printed texts were *dhāraṇī*s, protective spells, from Japan which date to about 770 CE and which had been printed already a million times by then (Grönbold 2005: 165–7). The oldest printed book in the world is a copy of the Chinese translation of the *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, which dates to 868 CE and was found in Dunhuang.[12]

Copying the word of the Buddha brings merit to the scribe and to the donor who sponsors the act of copying, regardless of the philological quality of the product. One of the best preserved of the manuscripts found in Pakistan and Afghanistan within the last decade or so is a case in point. It contains the *Dīrghāgama* (Figure 6.1), the "Collection of the Long (Discourses of the Buddha)," one of the major sections of the canonical scriptures of the school of the (Mūla-) Sarvāstivādins (cf. Hartmann 2004). It is a rare find, since the text has not been preserved elsewhere, but it presents challenges for scholars working on its edition. Long *sūtra*s that elsewhere comprise ten to twenty leaves are represented by two or three, leaves only; entire sections are misplaced or missing; and frequently, the wording is so corrupt as to be incomprehensible. The appearance of the manuscript, however, is quite beautiful; it is well written, by at least four scribes, as we now know,[13] who shared the work on alternating pages, which may account for some of the lost text. The manuscript is also exceptional on account of its radiocarbon dating that dates it between 764 and 1000 CE, a date which agrees well with the paleographical analysis (cf. Allon et al. 2006: 279f.). At that time, the act of copying a manuscript had apparently become a meritorious deed in itself that was not necessarily motivated by the intention of preserving the word of the Buddha. Rather, the principal aim had been to duplicate a religious object for the purpose of making merit.

Concerning the notion of the book as a ritual object, I add some remarks on the "cult of the book" which has become increasingly important in discussions on the emergence of the Mahāyāna (Schopen 1975; Vetter 1994: 1266–72; Nattier 2003: 184–6: for a critique of Schopen's ideas, see Drewes 2007).[14]

Mahāyāna *sūtra*s frequently hold out the prospect of enormous merit (*puṇya)* to those who venerate, recite, expound, or read and copy them. They also declare the location of such acts or of the book itself to be eminently sacred, as if the Buddha himself was present. It is striking that these texts make mention only of themselves, as though no other texts existed that espoused similarly meritorious rewards. This communicative strategy makes use of the commonly accepted idea that texts offer protection and benefits, such as *puṇya*, to people and places. It also conveys the notion that certain texts are more apt to do so than others. What scholars often identify as a "cult" of the book may perhaps be equally well understood as a way of promoting a particular text in a highly competitive environment (cf. Harrison 2006: 148, n. 57). One is reminded here that Mahāyāna *sūtra*s are normative texts that may or may not describe a reality. To assess this question, we require confirmation from other sources, which appears to be absent (cf. Schopen 1975: 171f.). This is frequently the case in ancient India, where usually very meager direct evidence on the life ways of people is outweighed by a gigantic amount of normative literature. For this reason, it may be difficult to demonstrate the existence of a Buddhist cult of the book in India during the first millennium, but the phenomenon is well documented in later periods[15] and in other areas of the Buddhist world.

Notes

1 For the version of the school of the Mūlasarvāstivādins cf. Obermiller 1932: 73ff.
2 Cf. Falk 1993: 337 after most comprehensively presenting all the available evidence: "Es gibt keinerlei Hinweis auf die Existenz der beiden Schriften Brāhmī und Kharoṣṭhī vor Aśoka" ("There is not the slightest indication of the two scripts Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī existing before Aśoka"), but cf. Salomon 1998: 12 and 14 on the problem of inscribed potsherds from Sri Lanka "which are said to be securely assigned by radio-carbon dating to the pre-Mauryan period" (12).
3 Cf. Hinüber 1996: 89 for the date.
4 For an overview of these two scripts, see Salomon 1996.
5 For this and similar ornamental signs, cf. also Scherrer-Schaub et al. 2002: 191–194.
6 *Buddhistische Manuskripte der Großen Seidenstraße*. Das Lotossutra und seine Welt, Soka Gakkai Internationale Deutschland e.V. 2000, 9, no. SI P/5.
7 The fragments were identified by Kazunobu Matsuda, Kyoto, as belonging to the *Pratītyasamutpāda-ādi-vibhaṅga-nirdeśa-sūtra* corresponding to *Nidāna-saṃyukta* no. 16, cf. Tripāṭhī 1962: 157–164. For a closely related text, the *Nagaropamasūtra*, cf. Bongard-Levin et al. 1996.
8 For the possibility of substituting relics with specific written texts cf. Falk 1997: 92 and Strauch 2000: 217f.
9 For protective texts cf. Skilling 1992.
10 For this formula and its various versions cf. Boucher 1991, Huber 1992, Falk 1997, Skilling 1999, Strauch 2000 and Skilling 2002; presently Stefan Baums (Seattle) is working on a set of plaques from Merv; for the use of the *Nagaropamasūtra* and the *ye dharmā* formula in cultic inscriptions cf. also Salomon 1998: 122f.
11 Cf. the idea often expressed in *Mahāyānasūtra*s that even one stanza recited, taught or otherwise transmitted will confer the same merit as the whole text, see Schopen 1975: 148 and *passim*.

12 Cf. http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/themes/landmarks/diamondsutra.html (accessed 29 February 2008).

13 This is convincingly demonstrated by Gudrun Melzer in her doctoral dissertation on a part of the Śīlaskandha section of the *Dīrghāgama* manuscript, cf. Melzer 2006: 68–77.

14 In addition, for a critique of Schopen's ideas, see now Drewes 2007.

15 For an example from present-day Tantric Buddhism in Nepal, see Gellner (1996).

Part III
Curating

7 Between Zhongfeng Mingben and Zhao Mengfu

Chan letters in their manuscript context

Natasha Heller

The attractions of printed text are significant: they can be produced with relative efficiency, facilitating a wide distribution, and expanding readership. Narratives of the rise of printing told from a technological perspective tend to focus on this end. In the case of China, the emphasis on technological development has often meant querying why print did not have the same impact it had in Europe.[1] This focus often seems to entail the assumption that its many advantages push handwritten texts to an ever-smaller role. Indeed, this has often been the narrative suggested for the transition from manuscript to print in China, emphasizing the pivotal role of the Song dynasty in the development of print culture. In particular, imperial sponsorship of major printing projects, including the Buddhist canon during early Northern Song seems to have provided a catalyst for the expansion of print culture. Yet manuscript copies continued to play an important role in literary culture, and printed books coexisted with manuscripts far longer than has been assumed, as Joseph McDermott has argued in a recent monograph (McDermott 2006: 45 and *passim*). More importantly, all premodern printed matter by necessity began as a handwritten text, as a manuscript. Printed matter, after a certain point, is favored in the texts chosen for preservation, but the readers lived in a world where handwritten texts—which do not often survive—would have surrounded them. Letters, notes, poems, and first drafts are among the many forms of such handwritten texts. Moreover, texts are not generated, either by hand or by mechanized means, solely as disseminators of information; rather, the form and material of the texts carry values that may either mesh with, or diverge from, the values assigned through the content of the texts. This essay will examine the intersection of print and manuscript, of form and content, through a consideration of letters to and from the Chan monk Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1263–1323). Mingben was one of the most prominent Buddhists of his time, a monk who expressed his commitment to the tradition, both through his writings and by establishing private cloisters separate from mainstream monasteries. He was honored during his lifetime by the imperial court, and counted among his lay patrons both local elites and national figures like the statesman and literatus Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫(1254–1322). Some of these traits mark him as an exceptional monk, but I will not be arguing here that his practice of letter writing sets him apart. Where Mingben differs, however, is

in the role calligraphy played in his life. Not only was Mingben renowned for his talent, but also one of his chief disciples, Zhao, was the foremost calligrapher of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). As result, a number of Zhao's letters to Mingben have survived, their manuscript form providing a supplementary perspective to those letters included in Mingben's own collection of writing.

Before approaching this set of letters, it is worth considering how the form of texts influenced their value. Mahāyāna scriptures almost invariably include exhortations for the text's repetition and circulation. Both the preservation of the text and its propagation are described as generating merit, and this merit is often touted as quantitatively well beyond that which is produced through other types of devotional offerings. Upholding or promoting a *sūtra* can occur through recitation, but these *sūtra*s also encourage the practice of copying out the text. Take, for example, the final chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, in which the refrain to copy, recite, and transmit the scripture is repeated: "For this reason the wise should single-mindedly copy the *sūtra*, or make others copy it, accept and uphold it, read and recite it, properly commit it to memory, and practice as the sūtra preaches" 是故智者, 應當一心自書、若使人書, 受持、讀誦, 正憶念, 如説修行 (T. 9: 61c13–14). Such recommendations are, of course, in line with the means by which texts circulated in China before the time of print: not only was memorization important, but also, to possess a text meant copying it or having it copied. The Buddhist tradition contributes the idea of merit, which adds to the practical process of copying an element of devotional effort. A text might be copied not primarily for one's own use, but as a means to generate merit, very often on behalf of someone else. Nor was a single copy necessarily the aim: a text could meritoriously be copied multiple times. Textual copying could also be coupled with bodily discipline, as in the case of those who copied out *sūtra*s in their own blood (Kieschnick 2000). Given that the copying was not solely intended to produce a usable text for reading, visual elements were also important. The paper used might be yellow—the dye discouraged insects—or dark blue, in order to highlight gold or silver characters (Tanabe 1988: 30). Manuscripts were thus both sacred words of the Buddha and a part of religious practice.

Buddhism was also intimately linked with the rise of print culture in China. The earliest dated printed book in China has long been considered to be the *Diamond Sūtra* from 868 found at Dunhuang (Twitchett 1983: 20). The sophistication of the work suggests that it is a product of developed printing technology, rather than an early foray (Nakamura et al. 1976: 29). The urge to disseminate scriptures, and for the state to benefit from the spiritual capital thereby generated, was also a factor in large-scale printings of the Buddhist canon, as in the case of imperial printings of the canon in the Northern Song. Although the state was a frequent sponsor of such efforts, large-scale printing projects were also undertaken by large monasteries (Ch'en 1951). Printing the Buddhist canon was not only a matter of making the texts widely available, but it also served to fix the corpus of Buddhist texts for a given age. While the canon remained open and emendable, such printings did serve to consolidate changes and confer legitimacy. Inclusion in the canon was a sign that a text was recognized as authentic and important, worthy of placement

in proximity to the words of the Buddha himself. The involvement of the imperial government in projects to print the Buddhist canon also tied inclusion to state approval and support. To accept a text into the canon was also to lend credence, at least tacitly, to the claims made in the text or to the importance of the author. Although we should not exaggerate access to these printed canons, in many ways, imperially sponsored canons became public documents of Buddhist tradition.

A hand-copied *sūtra* may lend itself more readily to artistic interpretation or enhancement, as in the examples noted above. Calligraphy especially provided a way to fuse devotion with art. Still, printed texts can also be rendered as aesthetic, rather than strictly informational, works; the clearest example of this is the incorporation of frontispiece illustrations of the Buddha preaching. Beyond their physical forms, texts also have a social dimension, constituted by the network of people implicated in the production and reception of a work. The social locus of copying a *sūtra* is relatively small, centered on the individual engaged in copying or in commissioning a copy. Those implicated in the act of copying might include family members, who were often the recipients of the merit generated through the act, as well as friends or acquaintances to whom the text might be given. Generally speaking, the aims of such copying for the production of merit are personal. Scriptures and other texts were copied as well for instructional purposes. The hand copying of such texts for study and transmission cast a wider social net, and involved learned monks and the institutions they represented. The manuscript form necessarily limited access, while, on the other hand, printing aims at a larger audience. The investment of resources necessary to produce woodblocks for printing means that such blocks will be kept with the possibility of reuse. Texts carved on woodblocks are durable and reproducible far beyond a single manuscript.

The foregoing discussion has emphasized the scriptural tradition over other kind of materials. Although not framed as merit-generating activities, commentaries, collectanea, and histories were also copied and printed, circulating among learned monks and their followers. As is well known, the rise of the Chan tradition was closely tied to new ideas of the role of texts within religious practice. Representatives of Chan both critiqued over-reliance on written words and generated new kinds of texts. As for the former, Chan claimed that it "does not set up words and letters" (不立文字), although its own rapid production of texts quickly paved way for a revision of this phrase, punning that Chan "does not depart from words and letters" (不離文字). However much Chan may have used words and writing, its understanding of the nature of truth and its transmission shaped the kinds of texts it produced.

Reliance on, and dissemination of, texts was equally suspect, as shown by the legend of Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163) destroying the woodblocks for the *Blue Cliff Record* (*Biyan lu* 碧巖錄) (Levering 1978: 32–33). This episode suggests the tensions at play in Chan's attempt both to condemn and to create texts. Although the work had been produced by his own teacher, Dahui felt strongly that the circulation of these texts were a detriment to Chan. Handwritten notes presented similar dangers. Note-taking was indeed widespread in Chan monasteries of the

time, as students sought to put the master's words, delivered in sermons and at less formal talks, into more permanent form (Berling 1987: 79–80). Dahui's predecessor and lineage-founder, Linji Yixuan 臨済義玄(d. 866), once scolded his students for their obsessive, furtive scribbling:

> That students today do not get it is probably because they take knowing words as understanding. In a big notebook they copy down the words of a useless old man, wrap it up in three layers or five layers, do not let anyone else see it, saying it is the "mysterious purport" and treating it as a treasure.
>
> 今時學人不得 。蓋為認名字為解 。大策子上抄死老漢語 。三重五重複子裹 。不教人見 。道是玄旨 。以為保重(T. 47: 501c14–c126)

These individually created manuscripts are the near opposites of copies printed from woodblocks. As with many texts, their value came from possessing one of very few copies. Here monks appear to have carried these texts about on their persons, but rare texts would have been very often secreted away in private libraries (McDermott 2006: 134–s147). In any case, these manuscripts are depicted as deluded as the woodblocks later destroyed by Dahui.

Yet this idea of note-taking, and the circulation of notes, points to one of the ways in which the Chan tradition expanded the notion of what counted as a sacred text. If the masters were enlightened, playing the role of the Buddha in this world, then their speeches had the same potential import as the teachings uttered by the Buddha. Writings collected in *yulu* 語錄, or collections of "recorded sayings," make a textual claim of access to an individual teacher, and this is further manifested in the inclusion of a greater variety of texts (Berling 1987). In the Song and Yuan dynasties, *yulu* came to be compiled shortly after a monk's death, often from materials already in circulation. Perhaps as a consequence, the scope of these collections also expanded, to include larger numbers of portrait inscriptions, poems, letters, and other material. In this way, the "recorded sayings" genre came to more closely resemble the literary collections (*wenji* 文集) assembled by secular elites, and were sometimes termed *guanglu* ("broad record") rather than *yulu*.[2] The addition of these texts to the Buddhist canon both helped to assure their survival and marked their significance. Thus, in the compilation of the literary collections of monks, what might be thought of as casual or occasional texts come to be treated in ways more closely associated with more formal texts. The prefatory remarks to Mingben's collection by Jie Xisi 揭傒斯 (1274–1344) emphasize recognition through entry in the Buddhist canon, and how this will make Mingben's writings more readily available to later generations. Similar intents were behind any collection, but the inclusion of a text in the Buddhist canon marked a greater measure of surety.

Of the genres included in *yulu*, *guanglu*, and other literary collections of Chan masters, letters are particularly embedded in the social life of monks, and intimately tied to art and material culture. That letters appear in the collections of Chan monks points to their importance in the interchange between monks and laity.

Personal instruction was not always possible, and this was likely especially true of lay followers. These elites, mostly men, may have encountered a Chan teacher and established a relationship while on an official posting, and later reassigned. A relationship with a Chan teacher in one region could likewise be interrupted by official posting to another region. In such circumstances, letters provided a vital link between student and teacher.

Before turning to these Chan letters, I want to briefly indicate parameters of letter writing through the Song dynasty. There are several different terms used to refer to correspondence, the most common of which refer to the physical materials on which letters were written. Indeed, two of these terms, *shujian* 書簡and *chidu* 尺牘, are synecdoches for letters, referring to wooden slips used for writing before paper. Letters in Chinese history ranged from formal exchanges on politics, including memorials to the emperor, to highly scripted affirmations of social connections. The letters that have survived, especially dating before the Ming, have done so by virtue of their content or the fame of their authors, and thus are not likely to represent the kind of epistolary exchanges conducted by those whose written words attracted less scrutiny. In an essay on the notion of privacy and letter-writing practice in China, David Pattinson concludes that correspondence was not expected to be a private matter. The vast majority of these letters is not highly emotive or personal: the authors seem to be aware that these letters are likely to circulate beyond their stated recipient.[3] Pattinson has suggested a useful means of distinguishing personal letters from those meant for a wider readership, suggest that if the opening and closing formalities are removed, these public sorts of letters show little that distinguishes them from essays, especially as they most often are persuasive or explicatory in content (Pattinson 1997: 13; see also Chung 1982: 38–42). These may be framed as exchanges between two people, but they were conducted with a larger audience in mind.

Ritual letters are a second type of personal correspondence. These are nearly devoid of unique content and should not be considered truly intimate letters. They are often sent at moments of great significance—weddings, funerals—and serve as an important means of reaffirming social and kin ties in the absence of personal visits. Our knowledge of such letters derives primarily from etiquette manuals and ritual guides. The large numbers of these guides found at Dunhuang indicate their functional and pedagogical importance for communities (Zhou 1995: 35). These manuals provided sample letters for different occasions, with variations dependent on the status of the sender and recipient. For example, one typical Song dynasty guide breaks the letter down into different components, and then indicates how each of these components could be varied for different recipients. The list of recipients includes monks, as well as parents, doctors, kinsmen, friends, tradesmen and others (Chen 1999: 57–60). In addition to what they tell us about the epistolary tradition, these guides also delineate social and ritual obligations. Because they are largely formulaic, and have little literary merit, few of these letters made their way into collections. The Japanese monk Ennin preserves some letters of this type in his account of travels in China, and there are scattered other instances (Ebrey 1985: 609 n. 60, and 610). A third kind of letter falls somewhere

in between these two types. Not intended for a larger audience—and thus not constructed as if an essay—but with greater content than strictly ritual letters, these letters more closely approach what we might think of as a personal letter. Such letters might pass between two friends, between teacher and student, or acquaintances with converging interests. Letters collected for their calligraphy problematize distinctions drawn on solely the basis of content. These letters seem to create a bifurcated readership: "[W]hile their texts were intended for private readers, their calligraphy was aimed at a public audience who would inevitably read them in very different contexts" (Bai 1999: 382).

As monks were themselves members of the lettered elite, they are frequent authors and recipients of all types of letters. Naturally, letters to and from monks were preserved long before the advent of Chan compilations. Perhaps the most well known early example of Buddhist letters in China is the correspondence between Huiyuan and Kumārajīva, concerned with the pressing doctrinal issues of the time.[4] There are also letters to monks scattered through the literary collections of the Tang and Song dynasties. In the Song dynasty, letters are regularly collected along with other writings in Chan *yulu*, and letters to lay followers seem to have been particularly important. To take one example, the letters of Dahui Zonggao—perhaps the most widely known set of letters within Chan—are predominantly written to lay followers. These letters include just two monks as recipients, out of a total of sixty-two. This may be partly explained by the way in which the letters came together. As a postscript to Dahui's collection reveals, the circulation of letters to lay followers provided a sort of substitute for personal meetings, and made the master accessible to a growing number of students. Their collection was prompted by Dahui's inability to keep up with the demands of students. It explains:

> The Chan master Dahui preached for over forty years, and his words filled the world. Generally, he did not permit his disciples to compile and record [his teachings]. But monks privately transmitted and wrote them down, and these became volumes. In later years, because of the number of requests, [Dahui] permitted these to circulate. But in the assembly there are former and latter, and what they have seen and heard [varies] from detailed to broad. There are dharma words obtained by worthy literati, treasured by each person; I have not had the opportunity to completely read these. What has been collected today is not exhaustive. I await another collection for which to write an afterword.
>
> 大慧禪師說法四十余年，言句滿天下。平時不許參徒編錄，而衲子私自傳寫，遂成卷帙。晚年因衆力請，乃許流通。然在會有先後，見聞有詳略。又賢士大夫所得法語，各自寶藏，無緣盡覩。今之所收，殊為未盡。俟更採集，別為後錄
>
> (Araki 1969: 243).

However, the number and type of correspondents a monk had does not appear to be a matter easily discerned from letters in their collections. That of Gaofeng

Yuanmiao, Mingben's own teacher, contains only two letters. One was written to one of his disciples, and in this letter, Gaofeng offers a spiritual autobiography, itself a feature of note (Z. 70: 711c–712c; Wu 1990: 239–242). The other is to one of his closest lay disciples Hong Qiaozu 洪喬祖, also the compiler of his *Chanyao* 禪要. In contrast to this paltry number, the *yulu* of Mingben's disciple Tianru Weize contains fifty-three letters, most of which are addressed to fellow monks. As we shall soon see in greater detail, the function and significance of letters for Chan masters such as these is obscured by the process of collecting. In the aforementioned cases, the selection process must have varied from editor to editor as the writings of a monk were collected and rendered into a more stable form. This makes it difficult to assert with any confidence what role letters may have played in the interchange between monks and lay followers, but the letters of Mingben and Zhao Mengfu do provided a suggestive glimpse into this area.

The very brief sixth fascicle of Mingben's collected works includes two letters to an exiled Korean king, with the king's initial letter prepended. The royal in question is King Ch'ung-sŏn wang (now often spelled Chungseonwang) 忠宣王 (1275–1325). After the Mongols conquered Korea, it became a vassal state to the Yuan. Consequent to their diminished sovereignty, the kings took Mongolian wives and resided in Dadu as servants of the court. Ch'ung-sŏn knew Zhao Mengfu at court, and became acquainted with Mingben through him. The two men corresponded, and the king personally visited Mingben in 1319. Ch'ung-sŏn was a generous patron, providing funds for the construction of a pavilion, among other donations. Given that the exiled Korean king was married to Mongolian royalty and under the supervision of the emperor, these letters to him might be considered a kind of official correspondence. The other letters in Mingben's collection are addressed to a Korean lay follower, to a minor poet, and to the abbot of a nearby monastery.[5]

These letters, I believe, reflect the kinds of public letters discussed above. They seem to have been included to illustrate key parts of Mingben's biography, as well as for their value as dharma instruction. For example, in his reply to a Korean lay follower, Mingben addresses four questions raised by the layman's letter. The first three questions concern the relationship of Chan to other Buddhist teachings and practices, in particular the importance of seated meditation, the role of chanting *sūtra*s, and the issue of whether Chan constituted a "separate teaching." The layman's final question concerns the meaning of the term "at-home *bodhisattva*" (在家菩薩), and the possibility of spiritual progress within the secular realm. Another letter exhorts a layman to keep up his efforts, and not to be misled by the tendency to over-intellectualize. These letters address very general inquires about Chan and practice, and not surprisingly, the themes of these letters echo those found in Mingben's sermons to laymen. Moreover, these discussions are of the sort that would be of potential interest to a wider group of people. As they appear here, there is also little personal in these letters, and no reference to the individual's families. As for letters in Mingben's own hand, one survives in Japan, where it was collected along with other examples of Mingben's writing and prized as a

"prime expression of authentic Chinese calligraphy" (Lauer 2002: 120; Tayama 1955: 39–40).

The letters in Mingben's *guanglu* contrast greatly with the types of letters a very prominent lay Buddhist sent to Mingben. There are twenty letters from Zhao Mengfu, the statesman, painter, and calligrapher. These were part of an ongoing exchange, and some of the letters make reference to correspondence from Mingben. As the most eminent of Mingben's lay disciples, Zhao was singled out for attention in Mingben's biography. Additionally, Mingben authored two pieces specifically for Zhao, as well as a eulogy depicting him as an ideal lay Buddhist (Yü 1982: 433–4). Given Zhao's importance, it would seem editors should have been eager to include letters addressed to him. That they did not do so suggests, albeit circumstantially, that the criteria for including letters in Mingben's collection was not based primarily on the fame of the addressee. (It is, of course, possible that all letters from Zhao were not available.)

A closer examination of the letters Zhao sent to Mingben yields a better understanding of lay Buddhist relationships and of how letters functioned within these relationships. These letters span a period of two decades, from 1300 to 1322, ending shortly before Zhao Mengfu's death. In terms of content, the highlights of these letters would appear to be a handful of passages in which Zhao discusses his understanding of Buddhism. One such passage is drawn from the first letter, in which the layman discusses his study of Buddhism to this point. In this letter, Zhao expresses regret that his past learning was so shallow, and confidence that he will make greater progress under Mingben's guidance (Inoue 1971: vol. 7, 207–8). Other letters suggest that Zhao saw Mingben facing problems parallel to his own. In another noteworthy passage, Zhao gently reprimands Mingben for retreating into the mountains, asserting that Mingben should be able to sort out

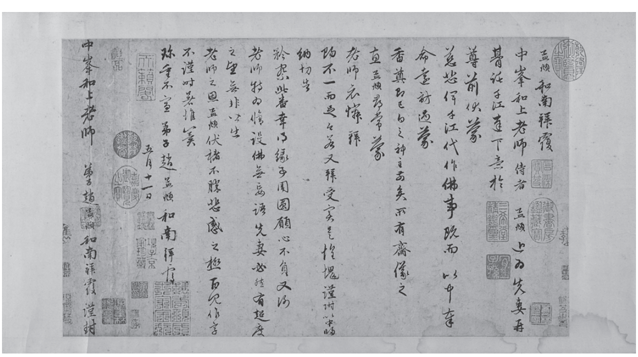


Figure 7.1 Zhao Mengfu, 1254–1322; Guan Daosheng, 1262–1319; Zhao Yuxi, fl. late thirteenth to early fourteenth century; Zhao Yong, 1290–ca. 1362. *Collected Letters of the Zhao Mengfu Family.* Six letters mounted as a handscroll, ink on paper. Princeton University Art Museum. (Photo Credit: Bruce M. White. Photo courtesy of Trustees of Princeton University. May not be reproduced without permission in writing from Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ 08544.)

those demands that truly merit his attention (Inoue 1971: vol. 7, 209). The subject of retreating from service resonated with Zhao, as he himself was deeply ambivalent about his decision to serve the Mongol dynasty. Responding to news of another, later, retreat into the mountains, Zhao relates how he is flooded with visitors seeking his calligraphy even though they do not know enough to evaluate calligraphy, and suggests that Mingben must likewise be fatigued by the demands of students (QYW 19: 44).

Read together, these passages show that Mingben and Zhao were quite close, and Zhao was sincere in his efforts at Buddhist cultivation. While these passages suggest a kind of intellectual companionship, they are not representative of the letters as a whole. Most of these letters are fairly short, do not expand on issues, and leave the reader with the sense of being in the middle of conversation. Taken as a whole, this correspondence records a series of exchanges and traces the movement of gifts, social connections, and ritual expertise. One letter from Zhao can serve as an entry point for these issues. It reads as follows:

> Mengfu offers his respect to the monk Zhongfeng, my teacher. My elder brother has arrived, and I have received your letter. I read it the same day. That you are well comforts me. Unfortunately, on the twentieth day of the first month, my young daughter died prematurely. My grief is deep, and has no end. Although I know the allotment of life and death are fixed and coming and passing away are constant things, yet with each thought of her I am uncontrollably sad. Also, my wife adored this daughter, and spends her days weeping and crying out in sorrow—I cannot bear to hear it. Recently, I have copied the *Diamond Sūtra* in one scroll and wish to send along. Now that my brother is here, I entrust this to him to take back. I hope the teacher will provide instruction to my daughter in the dark realms [after death], so that she may not obscure her luminous spirit, and more quickly be born among men and gods. Your disciple cannot hold back sorrowful tears at the excess of my hopes. I have already overstepped myself in [asking you] to write a colophon to the *Lotus Sūtra.* (I have sent a week's worth of mushrooms as an offering.) I have received your willow-script and was deeply moved by your thoughts. My wife also adds her thanks. I truly hope you will come to preach on behalf of our deceased daughter and cause her to be liberated. Humbly, it is through your compassion that she will be able to approach this. How fortunate! I have not expressed it all. Your disciple Mengfu again offers his respects.

> 孟頫和南再拜, 中峰和尚吾師侍者 。俊兄來蒙賜書, 就審即日 。道體安隱, 深慰下情 。孟頫不幸正月廿日幼女夭亡 。哀懷傷切 。情無有已 。雖知死生分定, 去來常事 。然每一念之 。悲不能勝 。兼老婦鍾愛此女 。一旦哭之 。哀號度日 。所不忍聞 。近寫金剛經一卷 。卻欲尋便上納 。今得俊兄來就浼其持去 。望師父於冥冥中 。提誨此女 。使之不昧明靈, 早生人天 。弟子不勝悲泣願望之至 。法華經已僭越題跋 。摩姑一裡聊充供養 。承惠柳文 。感佩尊意 。老婦附此上謝 。甚望師父一來為亡女說

法。使之超脱, 伏惟仁者慈悲。惠然肯臨。幸甚。不宣。弟子孟頫和南再拜

(Inoue1971: vol 7, 208–9).

This undated letter survives in a Japanese collection, preserved as much for the fact that it was written by one of the foremost calligraphers of the age as for its literary and intellectual value. Because of the prominence of the writer-calligrapher, it could be collected and treated as an art object apart from its content. Of course, letters, in any collection, all began as an individual's writing on a piece of paper, then moved through time and space, and were read by other individuals. However, reading letters as printed in collections tends to divorce them from their materiality, and diminishes their social setting. Letters themselves may preserve traces of this materiality in references to letter boxes, messengers, and to the physical act of unrolling the letter.[6] An individual's handwriting was also important. Toward the end of this letter, Zhao remarks on Mingben's "willow-script" (柳文). This expression refers to the Chan master's very distinctive style of calligraphy, the strokes of which taper on both ends, causing them to resemble willow leaves. In such ways, reading a letter was also an aesthetic experience, providing a moment to acknowledge and enjoy a friend's personal style of brushwork.

Beyond just the interplay of paper and ink, letters have another material aspect. Very often letters were accompanied by gifts. In his study of Su Shi's letters, Ronald Egan notes that these were "mostly quite humble items" and that "the exchange of these things was important, perhaps as important as the notes themselves, in affirming affection and friendship" (Egan 1990: 574). In this particular letter Zhao Mengfu writes that he will include along a copy of the *Lotus Sūtra* in his own hand. Because of Zhao's prominence as a calligrapher, this would have been a work of cultural value as well as part of his own religious practice (Huang 2004). He also indicates that he is a sending some mushrooms to Mingben. In other letters, Zhao mentions sending copies of the *Diamond Sūtra* and the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment*, a grave inscription, ginseng, and five-flavor medicine. Further, Zhao acknowledges receiving eulogies and ritual texts from Mingben, as well as incense, and statues to be used in a rite for Zhao's wife after her death. Letters were not solely texts, but an element of gift exchanges. These exchanges had a social dimension as well, dependent on social connections and also serving to reinforce such bonds. Here, Zhao's brother brings the letter, but elsewhere in the series of missives, Zhao refers to letters brought or sent back with monks as well. Other letters indicate that Zhao and Mingben acted as intermediaries, facilitating contacts and exchanges between their acquaintances. Letters were a key way of strengthening social networks.

Returning to the letter itself, note that it opens and closes using the expression *henan* 和南, a transliteration of *vandana* and an expression of ritual respect. First, it is significant that we have this salutation: in many letters as they appear in collections, these ritualized beginnings and endings have been deleted. These are repetitious, sometimes lengthy, and contribute little to the literary value.

Yet they are not without meaning if we want to understand the significance of letters. These opening and closing formulas were intended to demonstrate etiquette and knowledge of proper forms (Ebrey 1985: 611). That said, there was some variety in how monks were addressed, and these different ritual phrases could subtly indicate the stance of the author. *Henan* was a salutation with a Buddhist inflection, in contrast with a more conventional opening such as "I knock my head and bow twice" (頓首再拜), which was also to be used when addressing monks.[7] Both expressions refer first to bodily acts of ritual, and their written form thus evokes personal encounters. That is, these exact expressions are used to describe real movement. These are not special literary expressions with no tie to ritual activity.[8]

The opening marks this letter as Buddhist, and in other letters, we see an interesting variation on a letter-writing conventions, one that allows Zhao to convey his respect. Nonreligious letter writers often referred to the desire to meet in person, face-to-face (Richter 2006: 24–6). The phrases typically used in secular letters were *ruo dui mian* (若對面) and later *ru mian tan* (如面談) (Pattinson 2002: 115). There are three instances in these letters in which Zhao expresses a similar sentiment, but uses the term or *dingxiang* (頂相), in a way that blurs the distinction between the man, his image, and signs of his enlightenment. The term *dingxiang* 頂相 translates the Sanskrit word *uṣṇīṣa*, originally meaning the invisible protrusion on the top of a Buddha's head, one of the thirty-two marks of a Buddha. The term also comes to refer to the portrait of a monk (Foulk and Sharf 1993–4). In one missive, Zhao compares receiving a letter to seeing Mingben's visage: "Reading [your letter] was like facing your image" (披讀如對頂相) (Liu 2002: vol. 44, 468; QYW, vol. 19: 42–3). Elsewhere Zhao rues the fact that he will not have the opportunity to see Mingben, writing, "[We] will not have the chance to see your visage" (未有望見頂相之期). In this case, the term *dingxiang* would seem to refer to the monk himself (Liu 2002: vol. 44, 469; QYW, vol. 19: 44). However close their friendship, the conflation of monk, the invisible symbol of his spiritual attainment, and portrait suggests that the relationship was always shaped by ritual attitudes and an awareness of the hierarchy of spiritual attainment. In addition to these instances, the general tone of this series of letters suggests that Zhao sees himself as, or willingly took the position of, inferior to Mingben, which would not likely have been the case were Mingben a layman.

In the central section of the letter translated above, we learn that Zhao's daughter has died recently. The letter from Mingben he mentions may have been one of condolence upon hearing the news; Zhao's reply here parallels the pattern and wording for acknowledgement of such condolences given in *Family Rituals* by the Song Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi 朱喜(1130–1200).[9] In discussing his grief, we can perceive an attempt by Zhao to connect this to Buddhist teachings: despite the fact that he knows life is impermanent, he cannot help his great sorrow. This expression of grief and his mention of how distraught his wife is, suggest an emotional intimacy between the two men. Zhao's letters following the death of his wife are yet more fulsome descriptive of his grief, and appear to be genuine, rather than ritualized, expressions of emotion. However, Shane McCausland makes the

important observation that the letter written immediately after his wife's death shows no corrections and is likely a fair copy made subsequent to an initial draft. This is in contrast to examples by other writers in which the calligraphy itself reflects grief through its urgency or lack of control (McCausland 2000: 90–1). That he may have made a fair copy does not diminish the emotions themselves, but reflects the care Zhao directed toward letter writing and calligraphy.

While discussion of grief shows a certain kind of intimate connection, Zhao wrote to Mingben not just as a friend or teacher, but as a specialist in death and salvation. Zhao desired for his daughter sermons to guide her through the afterlife. It is apparent from these letters—which also concern the death of one of Zhao's sons, and, most significantly, Zhao's wife—that the family routinely used Buddhist rituals in connection with death. Moreover, Zhao requested Mingben's active participation in postmortem rites. This is a different kind of commitment than a request for a eulogy, as it demands Mingben's personal involvement. However eminent Mingben was, Zhao clearly thought that this was a reasonable request to make of him. Although Mingben did not participate personally in these rites, he dispatched his disciples to act on his behalf, and also sent texts and ceremonial objects. While the ritual activities of monasteries are well known through their descriptions in monastic codes, here we have a reminder that even high-ranking monks could be expected to participate in smaller-scale rites.

In Zhao's solicitation of Mingben's ritual expertise for the funeral of his daughter, and in the brief note that "My wife sends her thanks" we see as well the way in which such interactions were not just friendships between two men, but relationships between families. I here use the term "family" to refer also to the group of disciples around Mingben. Zhao and Mingben may have been at the center of this relationship, but Zhao's wife and son also wrote to Mingben, and his brother delivered letters. Like her husband, Zhao's wife Guan Daosheng was an accomplished painter, calligrapher, and poet (Figure 7.1). She considered Mingben her teacher and exchanged letters and gifts with the monk independent of her spouse. Some of Mingben's disciples had an ongoing relationship with the Zhao family and were more than just messengers for the Chan master. Zhao sent his condolences to Mingben upon the death of his close disciple Yizhong, reflecting too that he also missed the deceased monk. This web of relations stands in contrast to the letters by Mingben included in his collection, which more closely reflect the one-on-one relationship between master and student.

Returning to Mingben's own collection, we can do no more than speculate as to why his letters to Zhao Mengfu were not included. Clearly, there would have been a number of letters—were they not retained by Zhao, or in copy by Mingben? Zhao mentions Mingben's distinctive script, and that he kept a portrait of him, so it seems likely that the letters themselves would have been valued as tokens of the master. Rather, it seems probable that Mingben's letters were not collected, because their content echoed that of Zhao's letters. They were likely personal, concerned with families and rituals rather than Chan theory and practice. Although Chan guanglu often suggest a kind of verisimilitude in their format and style, the compilers of Mingben's collection may have selected for the rarefied over the mundane. This is

not unexpected, but we do well to remember that letters in these collections show only a narrow section of the relationship between elite Chan monks and their literati followers. The selection of letters in Mingben's collection also obscures the extent to which letters facilitated more mundane sorts of social exchanges. While the correspondence between Zhao and Mingben lacked the sort of content, editors thought would be of interest to their audience, the letters left out are in some ways more valuable than those included. Without such letters, the material components and ritual aspects of social interactions fade. Through Zhao's letters, we have glimpse at the rich nexus of text, objects, and rituals through which monks shaped their connections with the wider world.

These letters provide us as well a sense of some of the tensions involved in transforming everyday texts—sermons, inscriptions, letters—into the public documents represented by *yulu*. This is especially true of *yulu* or *guanglu* of those monks whose stature made likely the dissemination of their works, and their rapid inclusion in printings of the Buddhist canons. Although compilers and editors do not generally record their decision in the negative—that is, offering rationales for the exclusion of texts—we gain by the comparison of these two sets of letters some sense of how this happened. Here, it seems apparent that there are differing notions of private, or personal, versus the public. As I argued above, the letters included in Mingben's *guanglu* are evidentiary documents for his life or teaching materials. These are letters that function as public documents. The majority of the letters from Zhao Mengfu to Mingben, on the other hand, are limited in their scope. They focus primarily on death rites for family members, an essentially private act. What there is of "spiritual" discourse happens as part of a longer conversation, short remarks which require deduction—and conjecture—on the part of later readers. These elements, then, may have made such letters less suitable for public circulation.

Ritual, too, plays a role in this distinction between private and public. Bodily movements and salutations are acts of a person, and their formalized expression in written words points to these performances. The inclusion of ritual language in published letters is an index of personal status. Of the published letters, the missive with the most pronounced ritual apparatus is to the exiled king; its inclusion is a public gesture, indicating Mingben's recognition of his stature and knowledge of the proper protocol for approaching such a person. In most other letters, these openings and closings are excised: the suggestions of the writer's personal emotions are removed to make the writing more public. On the other hand, Zhao's letters reflect the role such ritualization played, and the play within expressions of ritual: the letter becomes a stand-in for the person to whom ritual greetings are addressed. In this way, the gestures within reading and writing correspondence become echoes of personal meetings. One final point might be made with regard to the idea of public and personal within these letters: even given the emotional charge and familial nature of the letters, their aesthetic merit made them public as well. If these were indeed fair copies made by Zhao, he too recognized the interest the letters would arouse for others. This public appreciation, however, is bound in different ways to the content, as such letters open the possibility of

seeing emotion expressed through calligraphic brushwork, something not necessarily possible with Zhao's copies of *sūtra*s. This public is different from the public of the monk; the recipient is not the sole audience.

As other scholars have observed, the removal of ritual language is often the most striking difference between manuscript and published versions of letters. Analysis of Zhao's correspondence points to other ways in which letters themselves were tied to the physical presence (or absence) of the author and recipient. Through gifts, through reverence for the letter itself, and through the letter as substitution for the author, the letter requires awareness of the body. I would suggest that this aspect of the bodily represents a key difference between handwritten and printed texts. The manuscript—whether copied *sūtra*, furtively written notes, or letter—carries its origins in the physical act of a person writing to later acts of reading.

Abbreviations

GL *Tianmu Zhongfeng Heshang Guanglu* 天目中峰和尚廣錄 (1965), in *Zhonghua Dazang jing* 中華大藏經, 1:74. [Taibei]:Xiuding Zhonghua Dazang jing hui.

T. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 (1924–1932) *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai.

QYW Li Xiusheng 李修生 (ed) (1998–2005) *Quan Yuan wen* 全元文, 60 vols, Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chuban she.

Z Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照 (ed) (1975–1989) *Shinsan Dai Nihon zoku Zōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經, Tōkyō: Kokusho Kankōkai.

Notes

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1 For a summary and critique of Eurocentric approaches to the study of printing in China, see Chow 2004: 6–14. For a recent study on the rise of printing in China, see Barrett 2008.

2 For useful comments on the composition of Chan *yulu*, see Schlütter 2004: 181, 198–200. Here Schlütter writes "that the real audience for Song-dynasty Chan literature was the educated elite" (198). This, along with fairly frequent involvement of lay followers in the compilation of *yulu*, would contribute to their resemblance to literary collections.

3 Pattinson 2002: 113 and *passim*. Elsewhere, Pattinson argues that in the Qing dynasty letters served as a means to exchange cultural news, and while these may have been more personal in some ways, they also carried with them the expectation of an extended readership. See, for example, Pattinson 2006: 153–4. This lack of the expectation of privacy in Chinese letters may be compared with medieval Europe, where letters were intended to communicate that which could not be entrusted to a messenger. Yet these too were not entirely private, as letters were most often dictated and then read aloud to the recipient. See Camargo 1996: 2–3.

4 For a discussion of the number and format of these letters, see Wagner 1971.

5 *Quan Yuan wen* contains another letter to a monk not in Mingben's collection (雲居寺中峰和尚札) obtained from a late Qing (1900) gazetteer, *Liangzhe Jinshi zhi* 兩浙金石志. See *QYW*, vol. 21, pp. 742–3.

6 Christian de Pee makes a similar point with regard to wedding correspondence; see de Pee 2007, especially chapter 2.

7 This expression and variations of it are common. For an example of its use in a letter to a monk, see Yelü Chucai's letter to Wansong in *QYW* 1: 217. Chen (1999) gives *henan* as part of the ritual salutations for a monk. Not surprisingly, this is the only ritual expression derived from a foreign phrase, its own marker of Buddhism's status.

8 For the use of *henan* as physical movement, see *Sifen lu* 四分律, (T. 22: 1007a18) cited in Charles Müller, ed. *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* (http://buddhism-dict.net/ddb/). Patricia Ebrey takes note of Ennin's remark that monks, when exchanging greetings on the winter solstice, used the exact words given in written guides to letters. She suggests that, given the literary flavor of these expressions, the influence ran both ways. Ebrey 1985: 607–8.

9 For example, he uses "unfortunately" (不幸), the variation Zhu Xi gives for children, to substitute for "disaster" (凶禍), used in the case of grandparents. Likewise, he uses "sadness" (悲), the appropriate emotion for the death of a child. I have consulted the 1341 edition of *Family Rituals* reproduced in Ebrey 1991. The relevant passage appears on the upper register of p. 208.

8 Two Buddhist librarians

The proximate mechanisms of Northern Thai Buddhist history[1]

Justin McDaniel

Historians of Buddhism in Northern Thailand have generally only paid attention, in de Certeau's terms, to the "strategies" of those in power, rather than the everyday "tactics" of individual Buddhist students and teachers who are attempting to design their own practices, beliefs, and ways of knowing. The attention paid to strategies alone has obscured messy local histories constructed by local memory, rhetorical styles, and family reputations in favor of regional histories defined by grand phases of rise and decline of golden and dark ages. Monastic educators, if studied at all, are seen as simply pawns of secular government forces, and macroeconomic trends, not as active agents who often operate outside and in direct opposition to institutional and ideological coercion.

In contrast, this essay offers a close study of two monks, Krūpā Kañcana of Wat Sung Men and Phra Kesarapañño of Wat Lai Hin, in an effort to move beyond studies focused on political reform, warfare, and institutional structure. The use of vague terms like "deep-seated drives" and "underlying patterns" will be avoided, as will be even more ambiguous terms like "syncretism" and "foreign influence." The vagary is sustained by a study of structural mechanisms—reforms, edicts, laws, standardized texts, and canons. Instead, I closely examine the "proximate mechanisms" of pedagogy, monastic economics, local prestige, and legend.[2] These mechanisms reveal a highly connected and mobile monastic population, which traded, copied, and shared manuscripts across kingdoms' "borders" despite military and political upheaval. First, I will briefly recount what we know about the two greatest monastic librarians and scholars of the Lan Na kingdom and perhaps all of premodern Thailand. Then, I will move on to some reflections on how studying the processes of composing, collecting, editing, teaching, and preserving manuscripts in the region can help us better understand the textual history and local intellectual history of Buddhism in the region.

My first goal is to investigate these "proximate" mechanisms of Buddhist history. My second goal is to encourage a greater investigation into the vernacular manuscript traditions of Northern Thailand. Krūpā Kañcana and Phra Kesarapañño are honored locally because of their support of local vernacular literature not necessarily for their Pāli scholarship. Indeed, they may not have known Pāli grammar very well. This is not strange. Most Southeast Asian Buddhist intellectuals

compose texts in the vernacular. However, scholars in field of Buddhist Studies still emphasize that Pāli is "the" language of Theravada Buddhism and that it is more prestigious. Students in Buddhist Studies are trained in Pāli and Sanskrit, as I was, and the vernacular is largely seen as optional. More research is conducted on the few Pāli texts composed in the region than the masses of vernacular texts. Thousands of these manuscripts remain in archives, unread by Western scholars. Indeed, many scholars of Buddhist Studies in Southeast Asia are not even trained in the vernacular languages and write entire studies with their knowledge of Pāli alone. The vast majority of vernacular manuscripts found in the libraries of Wat Sung Men and Wat Lai Hin have never been examined. Many Pāli texts originally composed in Thailand (although there are so few) have been studied in much greater detail than the masses of vernacular ones. This scholarly approach is incongruous with the way local Buddhist monks, novices, nuns, and laypeople study texts. Pāli is prestigious locally, but often relegated to recitation, not composition or analysis. The vernacular is honored, composed and discussed. Unfortunately, most Buddhist Studies scholars have not engaged in that local discussion. There are whole genres of vernacular Buddhist literature ignored by the field.

Wat Sung Men[3] and Krūpā Kañcana

Krūpā Kañcana was one of the greatest manuscript collectors of his time. Without him, we would know little about almost 300 years of Buddhist intellectual development in Northern Thailand and Laos. There is no greater single preserver of manuscripts in the history of Buddhism in Laos, Thailand, and even Cambodia and Burma. He was so important that there was a manuscript library built in the nineteenth century in honor of his work. The present library at Wat Sung Men has been recently rebuilt, but was based on an older design. The manuscript library (*ho trai*) is a small building, surrounded by a narrow moat, with a sloping ornate roof and a tall but narrow wooden doors (Figure 8.1). The moat is designed to keep away fire and insects who chew on the sweet palm of the texts. The thick doors and absence of windows, like those on manuscript libraries throughout Laos and Thailand, let in very little sunlight to protect the texts further.

The manuscript collections of Northern Thailand are so vast and diverse that treating the monasteries in Phrae, Savannakhet, Chiang Mai, Chiang Saen, Kengtung, Luang Phrabang, Nan, and Lampang, among others, collectively is almost impossible. The only possible way to understand the institutional history of monastic schools is to take one monastery at a time. Manuscripts are not products of a religion or a culture, but of one individual or a small group of people living in a specific time and specific place. They are not simply constituted by their intellectual milieu, but are constitutive of it as well.

Recently, the history of Wat Sung Men was compiled from oral legends by Luang Pho Krūpā Kamphirasan of Wat Muang Mu in Phrae Province. The monastic history begins with the story of a young mother who went to the forest to give birth. After her son was born, a tiger carried them away. When her husband



Figure 8.1 The interior of Wat Sung Men's manuscript library (*ho trai*). Manuscripts are housed in large cabinets (*tu*) or caskets (*hīp*). Phrae Province, July, 2000, photograph by Justin McDaniel.

returned from a long day working in the paddy he called out for his wife. After getting no response and seeing the tiger tracks, he deduced her fate. He sent his two sons to the village of Sung Men to report the tragic news. The community refused to accept that she was lost and formed a search party carrying torches and following the tiger's tracks. After a night of searching, they came to a brook south of the present day city of Den Chai about 15 kilometers south of Sung Men. They found the tiger gently caressing the mother and her newborn, who were unharmed and sleeping. The tiger had washed the newborn with his tongue. They thanked the tiger and returned to Sung Men where they built a new home.

This story of the newborn was related by a student over 150 years later. The story is important because the newborn in the story went on to become the abbot of the Wat Sung Men. Wat Sung Men is no longer in the forest near a brook. It is now situated on a newly built highway in the remote province of Phrae. It is flanked by rice paddies, auto repair shops, tailors, rattan furniture stands, and noodle shops. Driving by at 70 mph, most people would hardly notice it. Still, it is known to scholars and devotees alike because of the work of the abbot whose first breaths touched the fur of a tiger.

This oral history tells us much more about Krūpā Kañcana than the structural history of the province; however, it has been ignored by scholars. I recently attempted to acquire all possible sources that could provide information on the year 1836 in Phrae Province, Northern Thailand. This was the year that the largest numbers of manuscripts were composed at Wat Sung Men about 200 kilometers from Chiang Mai (Figure 8.1). After consulting with all known experts, I acquired the only published work specifically on Phrae History. This is by Dhawat Rotphrom, *Prawatmahatthai suan phumiphak changwat phrae* (Rotphrom 1998: 20–7, 65–73, 146–55). He does not cite its sources and provides

little information on the 1830s. It mentions attacks from Burma, Siam, and Laos, but no details on intellectual activity at local monasteries. Even in the section on the "who's who" of each district in Phrae, Kañcana is not mentioned for Sung Men District. Before 1919, there are no dates for when local leaders were in power, but a local historian in Phrae and the abbot of Wat Sung Men told me that a member of Phrae's royal family, Luang Chairatpamrong, was the head of Sung Men in 1836, but he is not mentioned in colophons. It seems that Kañcana was supported by nobles in Laos, but not directly supported by local Phrae patrons. During Kañcana's youth (up to 1810) Sung Men was ruled by a man of Burmese descent (*Chao Pama*). The fact that he was considered "ethnically Burmese" is supported by the need for the author to state that he "loved the people of Phrae." This probably would not have been necessary to state if he was a local, ethnic Northern Thai. It also mentions that there were attacks by the Siamese on Phrae during this time, but provides little detail. Since Sung Men is only eight kilometers south of the provincial capital and on the main route (now a highway) that goes through the valley south toward central Thailand, Kañcana must have witnessed attacks from Siamese armies during his lifetime. Chao Thepwong (or Chao Luang Lin Dong) ruled Phrae up until 1829; he was from Kengtung (the Khoen region of present day Burma). From 1829 to 1871 Phrae was ruled indirectly from Lampang by another Khoen man named Chao Inthawichai. The East Asiatic and Burma-Bombay Companies setup logging operations during this period, which brought in considerable wealth and was followed in the late nineteenth century by the building of a number of Shan monasteries in Phrae (like Wat Com Sawan and Wat Luang, where a Shan style manuscript library and *vihāra* are located). Chao Inthawichai tried to keep peace between the foreign workers, including many Shan laborers, and the local population. This is also mentioned as a peaceful period, which may account for the freedom of intellectual activity at Wat Sung Men. Indeed, the greatest flurry of manuscript production was between 1831 and 1839.

Sangwon Chotisukhrat's *Sarakhadi chak lan dong prawatsat Lanna Thai* (unpublished, 572–576) gives almost no information on this period in Phrae. Worapon Bāmbat, who was referred to me by the provincial records office in Phrae as the local historian, is a teacher of Thai literature and local language at the Narirāt Girls High School in Phrae. She was extremely helpful. Besides the new edition of Dhawat's book that only adds color plates, she had few other sources. She gave me a funeral memorial book self-published by Seri Chomphuming called *Meuang paepin haeng haeng Gosai*, a title that incorporates the old Khmer name of Phrae (Gosai) and the local language name of the provincial capital (no publisher, 2543 [2000]). This source gives much information on the foreign logging companies (H. Slate's Bombay-Burma Trading Company Ltd. and H. Jargd's East Asiatic Company). Other sources like *Virapurut chao meuang phrae* (*The Heroes of Phrae*) and the monastic histories from Phra That Nong Chan and Phra That Hae Haeng Meuang Phrae provide no information on Kañcana.

Lao sources are also vague for 1836 in Phrae. The Lao Ministry of Education's edition of the *Phongsavadan Lao* (*History of Laos*) reports on events in Luang Phrabang up to 1817 and then resumes in 1839. However, there is no

mention of Phrae. A prince in Luang Phrabang is mentioned as escaping rival Vientiane armies by going to Phrae in 1723. Nong Bua District in Nan was attacked in 1827 by Siamese armies who also burnt the Lao capital of Vientiane that year. Phrae is not mentioned in this attack, which is not strange considering that Phrae and Nan were under different levels of control by the Siamese, Kengtung and Chiang Mai at the time (one safe for a Lao ruler and another one not), even though they are situated close to each other. Other Lao sources hardly mention Phrae.

Besides being useful to those specialists who study Northern Thailand and Laos, this study of the history of nineteenth century Phrae is important, because it shows us the gaps in our knowledge of the region. First, there has been little interest and few sources for the study of cities like Phrae, which have no local chronicle (like for Nan or Chiang Mai) between the years 1526 and 1900. Furthermore, the manuscripts that are so important to Buddhist Studies and textual history are of little interest to local Northern Thai historians. Indeed the provincial historian, Worapon Bāmbat, and manager of the provincial museum at the Wongburi Phrae Royal Estate had never been to Wat Sung Men only eight kilometers away.

So what do we know? Krūpā KañcanaAranññavāsi Mahāthera (locally known as Krūpā Kañcanaor Krūpā Mahāthen), born in 1789, traveled throughout the region (including Laos) in the early nineteenth century collecting manuscripts and bringing them to Wat Sung Men. Historical records tell us almost nothing about his importance, but local legend identifies him as a major intellectual figure. There he supervised what was perhaps the greatest manuscript production center of premodern Thailand. Although there are few historical records, his work can be assessed from manuscript colophons and three inscriptions. The first inscription was on the library at Wat Phra Singh in Chiang Mai. In 1833, Krūpā Kañcana of Phrae walked from Wat Sung Men, some 200 kilometers away from Chiang Mai in order to request that the abbot of Wat Suan Dok produce a new copy of the *Tipiṭaka* and led a ceremony to mark the occasion at Wat Phra Singh. Krūpā Kañcana went to Wat Suan Dok first because the supreme patriarch was residing there at the time. An inscription on the back wall of the library at Wat Phra Singh tells of his visit. It was because of this library that Krūpā Kañcana wanted to have the work on the *Tipiṭaka* done at Wat Phra Singh. The library, the finest example of its kind in the North, was built in 1811 replacing the former library built in 1488 (Penth, Khruathai, and Ketphrom 1991: 177–94). Krūpā Kañcana had reason to see Wat Phra Singh as the appropriate place for Buddhist textual scholarship since the library had been further renovated in 1826 and the Siamese king, Rama III had visited the library in 1829. Rama III was so impressed that he had royal scholars from Bangkok move to Wat Phra Singh to study its manuscripts (Dechawongya, Bunyasurat, and Woramit 1996: 3–6; see also Penth, Khruathai, and Ketphrom 1991: 69–70). These manuscripts influenced curricula and canon formation in nineteenth-century Siam.

The second and third inscriptions are from Nan Province in 1833 and 1839 respectively. The first states that Krūpā Kañcana came to Nan to collect manuscripts and order copies. Later he went to Luang Phrabang to collect manuscripts. The second regards his persuasion of the governor of Nan, on

June 18, 1837, to order the composition/copying of 1,103 manuscript fascicles. Two years later, these manuscripts were moved to Wat Sung Men. This movement of manuscripts between the regions of Laos and Northern Thailand was frequent and Krūpā Kañcana was carrying on a long tradition that had begun in the 1520s. Krūpā Kañcana was also part of a royal project that had started three years previously. In 1830, the king of Chiang Mai gave manuscripts and Buddha images to monks from the city of Xieng Kaeng near Luang Nam Tha in (present day) Northwest Laos (Phothipuppha 1997: 27–8).[4] In the early nineteenth century we learn about the direct movement of manuscripts from Laos to Northern Thailand.[5] Krūpā Kañcana died in Southwest Tak Province on the Thai-Burmese border. This ended a long and productive career, which Harald Hundius summarizes well:

> …large numbers of people, from ordinary villagers to members of the ruling Royalty in his own and in neighbouring countries [came] to join the meritorious endeavours [producing manuscripts]…the peak of the copying efforts lay in the 1830s. In 1835–36, no less than 242 palm leaf manuscripts comprising 2,825 *phuuk* [fascicles] were copied in Luang Phrabang alone, for the better part scholarly texts like (sub-) commentaries on canonical and post-canonical Pāli literature, Pāli Grammar, a great many of which are bilingual (Pāli/NT or Lao) versions, including numerous works of the indigenous learned tradition, for instance a complete Nissaya version of the Paññāsa-Jātaka. The charisma of Gruu Paa Kañcana was so extraordinary indeed that the manuscripts collected under his aegis have been so well preserved by successive generations that they have been able to survive to the present day in a well-kept condition. Comprising well over 15,000 *phuuk* this collection represents the largest one known to exist in a single place in Northern Thailand.
>
> (Hundius 1990: 109–14)[6]

The records of Rev. Schmitt of the Mission Pavie state that the King of Luang Phrabang, along with the royal leader of Phrae and lay followers donated a large amount of silver as well as gold needed for gilding the edges of the leaves to the project in 1836 (Hundius 1990: 114). Krūpā Kañcana was well supported by Lao royalty and farmed out work to monasteries both in Laos and Northern Thailand. He attracted students, patrons and teachers to his school.

Krūpā Kañcana was famous for copying vernacular texts. Indeed, he may not have known Pāli grammar well and there is no evidence that he ever composed a Pāli text. Still, every monk I talked with in Phrae knew of Wat Sung Men and its large number of manuscripts and its *chedi* for Krūpā Kañcana. They might not have known any historical detail, but they knew the legends. Phra Suwat of Wat Sri Chum told me that Krūpā Kañcana was held up in esteem by Phrae monks, because he could write the local vernacular beautifully. His skills in Pāli, if he did have them, were not mentioned. Being famous locally for promoting vernacular Northern Thai texts is perhaps one of the reasons why he is not known nationally. There has been little effort to investigate the period after the rise of Burmese

power in 1558 and before the full Siamese administrative takeover in the early twentieth century, perhaps because of nationalist Thai policy or perhaps because of the scholarly inertia of focusing on history prior to the sixteenth century. Historians are not asking why there are no substantial sources for this long and recent period. Finally, Lao, Khoen, Burmese, Northern Thai and Western sources have not been incorporated in any comprehensive study to date, and there has not been a historiographical comparison of the different modes of discourse in the available sources as to what groups, interests, and ideas of time and space they represent. This is particularly striking considering the large numbers of manuscripts written or copied in the region; however, it is telling because it demonstrates the general emphasis on the study of Pāli canonical manuscripts versus vernacular manuscripts. Most of the Wat Sung Men (and surrounding monasteries) holdings are in the local language, not Pāli. Therefore, they teach us much about local religion, local social and intellectual history, and local pedagogical methods. Once the center of Buddhism, history, and education moved to Bangkok in central Thailand, the individuality and contributions of the periphery were considered less important.

Krūpā Kañcana's collection is the largest of its kind. It also incorporates mostly vernacular and bilingual genres (*nissayas, nāmasaddas, vohāras, ānisong, xalq̄ng, pithi, horasāt, parit, chādok nQ̄k nibāt*) that are also common in Laos. *Nissayas*, *Nāmasaddas*, and *Vohāras* are bilingual word glosses used to guide sermons. *Ānisong* (*ānisaṃsa*) are "blessings" that honor gifts made to the sangha and are often preludes to honor other Buddhist texts. *XalQ̄ng* (*Chalong*) are "celebratory" texts used to describe and instruct, often, nonmonastic rituals. *Pithi* are another type of ritual instruction, more often monastic, similar in some ways to the Pāli *Kammavācā* genre, but usually composed in the vernacular. *Horasāt* are astrological texts (replete with star and calendrical charts). *Parit* (*paritta*) are protective incantations. *Chādok nok nibāt* are noncanonical *jātaka*-like narratives. In fact, many of the manuscripts in Kañcana's collection seem to be drawn directly from manuscripts in Laos. Not only do the titles of the texts (non-canonical *Jātaka*, ritual texts, Abhidhamma commentaries, grammatica, etc) overlap closely, but also the contents of the texts are similar. For example, one of the most common manuscripts composed in Laos in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the *Dhammapada-Atthakathā*, however, we have no evidence that this very long Pāli text was copied as a complete text. Instead, individual stories were chosen from this collection of 267 stories. The stories chosen are similar in both Laos and Northern Thailand. This overlap in the choice of individual sections of long Pāli manuscripts is also seen in the *Paññāsa Jātaka* collections, *suttas*, and *parittas*.

Moreover, most Lao manuscripts produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not Pāli texts, but vernacular commentaries, glosses, and translations. Besides connections in the subjects of manuscripts, the orthography, rhetorical style, commentarial services, and physical features of the two traditions are intimately related so much so that these manuscripts can be seen as being the product of a relatively cohesive textual and educational community.

This indicates that the "revival" of Northern Thailand's literary tradition in the early to mid-nineteenth century, which is largely attributed to Kañcana, is directly connected to the Buddhist literary tradition that had been nurtured in Luang Phrabang in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The rise in vernacular genres, the importance of the cities of Nan and Phrae in literary production, and the explosion of writing in the 1830s that has occupied scholars of Northern Thailand for the last 50 years cannot be understood without understanding developments in Lao literary practices. Vernacular manuscripts are in greater abundance and generally better known.

Krūpā Kañcana is essential to any history of Buddhism, because many of the manuscripts, which he commissioned, composed or copied (by his own hand or by the scribes at his scriptorium) are *nissayas*, *nāmasaddas* and *vohāras*, which were used in the everyday education of nuns, monks, novices, and serious lay students not only in Northern Thailand, but also in Laos. These bilingual vernacular and Pāli manuscripts have been overlooked, because they are rough notebook style texts, but these manuscripts are the only evidence of how education was actually conducted at Wat Sung Men and surrounding rural monastic schools. Without the efforts of Kañcana these quotidian and proximate records would have been lost.

Wat Lai Hin and Mahāthera Kesarapañño

Second only to Wat Sung Men's collection is that of Wat Lai Hin Kaeo Chāng Yeun (Monastery of the Elephant who Stands on a Crystaline Hill; Pāli: Selāratanapabbatārāma) (Figure 8.2). Thanks to the surveying of Singkhla Wannasai of Chiang Mai University beginning in 1961, hundreds of Pāli, vernacular, and bilingual manuscripts have been catalogued at this monastery. Many have



Figure 8.2 The exterior of Wat Lai Hin's library (*ho trai*). Lampang Province, August, 2000, photograph by Justin McDaniel.

offered scholars new understandings of the evolution of Pāli and vernacular literature in the region. However, the monastery's own history and its present abbot do not emphasize the importance of the manuscripts. In fact, when I first visited Wat Lai Hin, the abbot gave me a tour of the *chedi*, a few Buddha images, and a collection of amulets, glass beads, and ritual implements kept in their small museum. He also related the story of the origin of the monastery that is recorded in local legends (see Khruchayan n.d.).

The monastery was founded on this particular spot in rural Lampang far from the river and any urban center because of the idiosyncrasies of an elephant. The story begins with two famous Buddhist envoys in Pāṭaliputra (Northern India), Kumārakassapa and Meghiya, who were told by the first Buddhist king, Asoka, to build *chedi* holding the bodily relics (*sārīkadhātu*) of the Buddha spread throughout the known world. The two monks put one relic on the back of an elephant and let the elephant lead them to the place where the relic wanted to rest. The elephant wandered from India to Northern Thailand and after bypassing many seemingly suitable places decided to stop and stand still at the very spot, where the present day Wat Lai Hin stands on a small forested hill in rural Lampang Province. The elephant would not move and eventually it was decided to build a *chedi* for the relic and a monastery to house the monks who would honor it. A competing version of the story states that the elephant merely rested at the place where Wat Lai Hin was built and actually stopped permanently at Wat Phra Thāt Lampang Luang about four kilometers away (Dhānathatto n.d.). Both monasteries claim a connection to the elephant and the relic. Stories of fickle elephants are very common in the region.

This small monastery attracted many students and from the differences in vocabulary and orthographic style of the manuscripts, we can assume that they came from long distances. They most likely stayed at Wat Lai Hin and the larger Wat Phra Thāt down the road. The monastery's chronicle reports that some students from Wat Luang Pā Chāng Haripunchai about fifty kilometers away also studied there. Haripunchai was a well-known center monastic education (started by the famous Phra Sumana). This might have given Wat Lai Hin some local fame. One student in particular was a young novice who wore a very dark colored robe. His oddly shaped head looked like a "nest full of animal feces." The other monks and novices supposedly stayed away from him and saw him as diseased. This strange novice was also exceptionally lazy and did not memorize texts, write, or read according to his teacher's orders. One day the abbot, most probably the monk Phra Kudī, gave this strange novice the task of memorizing the *Vessantara Jātaka* so he would be able to chant it for the laity at the celebration for the beginning of the rains retreat (*khao pansā*). However, when the day of the celebration came, the abbot was terribly nervous and feared that the people would not believe his sermons if they did not trust his student's ability to chant. Since he had not seen the strange novice study, he feared the worst. However, in front of the crowd, the strange novice prostrated three times to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha and sat down on the preaching throne (*dhammāsana*). He did not pick up the manuscript containing the *Vessantara Jātaka* that his teacher tried

to hand him. Instead he chanted the entire story (which is quite long) without one mistake. The abbot was so doubtful of his ability that he had to pick up the manuscript and read along as the strange novice chanted. He confirmed the novice's perfect memory.

After the celebration, the teacher still wondered about the novice's skills and decided to test him again. He took every manuscript in the monastery and removed the strings that bound the palm leaf pages together. He removed the wooden covers and scattered the leaves. He picked up the leaves at random and mixed them up. He took this well-shuffled collection of palm leaves and placed them in a large box (*hīp*). He asked the student to put all the manuscripts back in proper order. This is no easy task as many monastic libraries today have texts that have been scattered, have lost pages, and have been haphazardly reassembled in improper order. The strange novice did what many researchers today cannot do—he reassembled, perfectly, all the texts in less than an hour. The abbot was convinced and soon the novice was ordained as a monk with the name "Mahāthera Kesarapañño Bhikkhu." Soon he rose to the rank of abbot and made Wat Lai Hin, as the story goes, a famous school. Mahāthera Kesarapañño was particularly famous for being able to tirelessly inscribe (*chān*) dozens of pages of palm leaf a day. It is said that he inscribed the local script (*akson beun meuang*/Yuan) beautifully with a stylus made out of a coconut shell and often meditated in a distant cave.

One day, he decided to travel in the forest a long distance in order to find a quiet place to meditate. He came to the area of Kengtung (Chiang Tung) (modern day Eastern Burma about 350 kilometers north of Lampang) an area populated by the Khoen people whose monastic practice and knowledge of the Dhamma had waned.[7] Mahāthera Kesarapañño soon, it is said, fixed that problem with his great ability to teach. The local populace asked him "which monastery are you staying at while in our region?" To which he answered in a riddle "at a monastery with a shell that cannot be bitten through." After seven months of wondering what this peculiar answer could mean and a couple of foiled royal tricks, Kesarapañño revealed that since he used a coconut shell as the handle for his stylus, the "monastery with a shell that cannot be bitten through" was his stylus.[8] The knowledge of the Dhamma and the ability to transmit it was the only monastery of true value. Despite this teaching, the prince of Kengtung wanted to build a proper monastery for this clever teacher and ordered his slaves to come south from Kengtung and build a spectacular monastery in 1683.

This monastery is one of the smallest, but most ornate and best preserved in the region. Its walls measure only 32 meters by 20 meters and this small space holds a *vihāra*, chedi, and a small shrine. Inside the gate is a stone sculpture of a coconut. It is doubtful that many students could have studied inside the walls, but today, as there must have been in the seventeenth century, there are three buildings outside the walls, one of which is a library, built in 1919 by the Phayā Saen Tao of Chiang Mai. Thus, students most likely studied under the wooden roofs of *sālā* and performed rituals inside the walls. In the main *vihāra*, there is a statue of Mahāthera Kesarapañño placed on a preaching throne next to a Buddha image.

From the hand of the statue is a white string that leads to a manuscript box thus magically protecting its contents.

Monastic education and manuscript production

Besides this local legend, the half coconut and the statue we have little information about the manner in which Mahāthera Kesarapañño or any of the other teachers at Wat Lai Hin taught. There is simply no known information about daily life in monastic educational institutions in rural Northern Thailand. In fact, what we know about education at Wat Sung Men and Wat Lai Hin is limited to these local legends and information gleaned from manuscript colophons, the content of the manuscript libraries, and a couple inscriptions which only tell us that Krūpā Kañcana and Mahāthera Kesarapañño were voracious collectors and copiers/composers of manuscripts and ran efficient manuscript production center with many students. Still, we know more about the educational activity at these two monastic schools than any others outside of Chiang Mai. In short, we have no eyewitness reports, no royal edicts, no photographs, or other documents that could provide a snapshot of the day in the life of a Northern Thai teacher or student before the twentieth century.

The stories of Krūpā Kañcana and Mahāthera Kesarapañño indicate some important characteristics of premodern monastic schools. First, they were occupied by students, patrons, and teachers that traveled from distant towns and cities (including those in present day Laos and Burma) who were attracted to schools because of famous teachers and important relics, and that these teachers were not only known for their Pāli scholarship, but also for their ability to chant and teach the local vernacular. Although historians have often studied individual monasteries in isolation, frequent mobility is a virtue in Buddhist monastic life as it promotes nonattachment. The lack of family obligations also helps students and teachers move relatively freely outside the period of the rains retreat (three plus months when monks and novices are required to stay in one monastery). Teachers and students are also motivated to travel to monasteries that are well patronized and have texts, images, medicine, prestige, and food. Many monks want to be ordained at well-patronized monasteries so that they can forge contacts ("network" if you will) and secure favorable royal appointments of mercantile positions when and if they decide to disrobe. These legends tell us little about the training of students at these monastic schools and manuscript production centers, but we do know that monastic schools were not isolated from each other. Colophons show that students, scribes (both lay and ordained) traveled between monasteries. This is quite common today, and it is not strange to find students from many different towns and cities studying together. Lao, Khoen, Leu, and Northern Thai texts and teachers like Kañcana and Kesarapañño frequently moved between these areas. Even today students from Sipsongpanna in Southern China, Kengtung in Burma, and several regions of Laos come to study in Northern Thailand. Second, we know that in Northern Thailand, like Laos, vernacular texts were produced in much greater numbers than Pāli manuscripts.[9] Vernacular

texts were not considered secondary to Pāli texts for teaching and teachers could become famous for their ability to write the vernacular and teach eloquently in the vernacular. Third, local leaders saw supporting textual production (and thus, we assume, monastic education) as important alongside the forging of images, construction of *chedi*, and building of monasteries. Although the teachers themselves sponsored the copying and composition of many manuscripts, wealthy patrons, including royalty, were active in the support of textual production. Finally, there was no overarching standard curriculum at these or other monastic schools. These teachers and others did not systematically copy, translate or comment on texts that fall into any discernable chronological, regional, or thematic order.

The information gleaned from these stories is confirmed by the manuscripts.[10] Looking at the manuscript collections broadly we see that both urban and rural teachers in Northern Thailand based their curriculum mostly on vernacular or bilingual commentaries and glosses worked on by students from a variety of locales. Most of its collection is comprised of vernacular or bilingual *nissaya*, *vohāra*, and *nāmasadda* manuscripts of narrative, ritual, and grammatical texts. No two collections are the same and the orthography and the colophons confirm the lack of a regionally unified approach to the study of Buddhism. For example, a rare inscription that mentions manuscripts from Nan states in 1821 a local leader, Chao Sumanatewalat:

> [R]ealized that Buddhism [in Nan] had no learned leader or great teacher to lead and teach the Sangha. In order to prevent decline of Buddhism he resolved to do everything in his power. As of that day, Buddhism/had existed for 2,364 years, two months, and twenty-one days, and its future was therefore 2,635 years, nine months, and nine days. He appointed the abbot of Wat Paña Wat, named Thipphawongso,/as Sangharāja to advise and instruct the Sangha of Nan. To celebrate the appointment he invited/123 monks and 86 novices to receive food alms.
>
> (Wyatt 1994: 109)

In 1855, the local ruler of Nan had monasteries repaired and ordered the copying of Buddhist scriptures, that is the "Pāli and nipāta and nikāya and niyāya" costing 19,100 *thok*, quite a hefty sum for eighty fascicles.[11] This large collection includes a wide variety of canonical and extra-canonical, vernacular, and Pāli texts.

The manuscript libraries throughout Northern Thailand and Laos not only contain many vernacular and bilingual manuscripts (note: even though manuscript catalogues often list many Pāli titles, upon further investigation these texts are actually bilingual texts which start with a line in Pāli and are followed by a vernacular explanation), they also contain "secular" texts like medical (*tamrā yā*), astrological (*horasāt*), romances, and adventures (*nithān*), and these secular texts are often bound with Pāli and vernacular "religious" texts. These genres are so mixed (as we will see below) that dividing them along secular/religious lines is untenable.[12] For example, I was surprised when one manuscript I opened in Lampang contained a *suat mon* (Pāli ritual chanting book), a *waiyakon/vyākaraṇa*

(a vernacular text explaining some minor grammatical points), and a vernacular medical text.[13] Wat Sri Mongkon in Nan has a collection almost completely dominated by medical texts, protective incantations (*yan/saiyāsāt*), protective mantras (*paritta/manta*), and non-*Vinaya* ritual guides (*gāthā lae gam riak khwan*). Most of these texts are written in a mixture of vernacular and Pāli and often, medical texts, *mantras*, and protective texts are bound together which suggests the social history of these manuscripts and the way traditional medicine and protective magic incorporate Pāli *mantra*s. Indeed, like the Vatican Library collection, the libraries of the great Orthodox monasteries along the Aegean, or the Cathedral of Durham collection, many manuscript collections of the Buddhist monasteries of Northern Thailand and Laos are secular and vernacular texts that may seem out of place at a place of religious training.

The training at these monasteries was nonstandardized. Orthography, colophon styles, votive declarations, choice of what texts to copy or sponsor, and vocabulary in manuscripts all point to highly independent teachers and students whose training was more organic than systematic. There seems to have been no standard as to when a novice or monk was considered "trained." There seems to have been no standard examination system, and there is no evidence of social events like "graduation."[14] Indeed, Mahāthera Kesarapañño was seen as a lazy student and was not given formal ecclesiastical examinations by his teacher.

Novices, monks, and lay male students (there seems to have been a number of lay scribes at monasteries in the region; there is no solid evidence that women were ever involved in manuscript production, although they certainly would have been in attendance at sermons and were patrons of manuscript production) all worked together on manuscripts that were requested by their abbots/senior teachers or lay patrons. A patron provided the funding for the copying of a particular manuscript, most often narratives or ritual texts, in no discernable order, and a scribe, whether a novice, young monk, or lay devotee, under the supervision of the abbot or another senior monk copied the manuscript. Some monasteries, like Wat Sung Men, Wat Lai Hin, Vat Mai, Vat Ong Teu, or Vat Vixun, attracted a number of patrons; however, one monastery was only as successful as the skill of its teachers (for example, Wat Sung Men and Wat Lai Hin all ceased to be active producers of texts after the deaths of Krūpā Kañcana and Mahāthera Kesarapañño respectively) and of the generosity of their patrons. Scholar monks had to market their skills and service, just as many present-day professors are expected to win private and public grants and fellowships.

Evidence suggests strongly that scribes usually orally copied the work (i.e. a monk read one manuscript out-loud while the scribe listened to the dictation and copied it on to new palm leaf). Some manuscripts show signs that the scribe read the source manuscript and copied the text by sight. However, for many manuscripts, we do not know if the copy ever was in any contact (i.e. the same room/same desk or floor) with the source text or if the teacher was reciting the text from memory. This scribal practice allowed for the manipulation, expansion, re-arranging, and pedagogical use of Pāli and vernacular source texts in nonstandardized ways.

The mixed Pāli and vernacular colophons on manuscripts throughout the region show that the texts were produced at one monastery and then given to others, like Wat Sung Men and Wat Lai Hin, for protection, storage, and for the service of a school with more students (this is common today when scholars at small schools donate their personal libraries to large schools who have the students and the library facilities to make their private collections more useful to a wider audience). Manuscripts moved as frequently as students and teachers and therefore rural schools must be seen as similar to schools in Chiang Mai, Vientiane, and Luang Phrabang. They existed in a loose network of open campuses that shared teachers, texts, and students across the larger Tai speaking world of Eastern Burma, Laos, parts of Southwest China, and Northern Thailand. These networks, while certainly affected by the economy and warfare, were generally independent of the machinations of political leaders and borders.

Not only do these colophons reflect fear of loss, the collective production, and the connection between monasteries, but they also indicate that manuscripts were not only for the education of the audience (in this case, instruction on performing a regular monastic ritual, *kammavācā*, and an explanation of why it was performed), but also to help students practice writing and for compensation. It sounds like a science fair project or a book report popular in modern American schools—a student is given an assignment to teach others about a basic scientific law or about a good book, while doing this project, he learns about the book or law herself/himself and possibly wins a prize.

Conclusion

The proximate mechanisms of Buddhism in Northern Thailand reveal interpretative communities and reading cultures that had little, if any, centralized institutional control. Furthermore, Pāli canonical texts were often scarcely represented and often not taught in local monastic schools. In fact, different teaching lineages not only operated independently from each other, but even form greater trans-local understandings of the parameters of Buddhist literature. Only by going beyond institutional and ideological historical studies of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, can these "vernacular landscapes" made of rhetorical styles, local legends, and scribal lives be revealed.[15]

Notes

1 This article is a recasting of material found in my book (McDaniel 2008). I have added more extensive notes and new conclusions based on additional evidence for readers specifically interested in the manuscript culture of Northern Thailand and what it can teach us about Buddhist manuscript cultures in general.

2 See, comparatively, the introduction in Matory (2005).

3 Krūpā Kañcana himself had a manuscript catalogue produced in 1830 called the *Piṭakamāla* available *in situ*. Other manuscript catalogues are listed in the bibliography.

4 Although composing new Buddhist texts in Pāli was common before the 1540s, the rise of the vernacular literature, while Northern Thailand was under Burmese and Lao rule

alternately between 1558 and the 1775, must have been influenced by the Burmese, Shan, and Lao penchant for composing manuscripts in the vernacular and for the monks and patrons who traveled between the three regions. This was combined with the explosion of manuscript copying and writing in the 1830s – thanks to Kañcana and his Lao royal patrons (it is interesting to note that Kañcana went to Luang Phrabang after he had failed to gain support for a manuscript collection, composing, and copying project in Chiang Mai). Many of the manuscripts that he copied, distributed, preserved were brought from Laos.

5 This information is drawn from a local history by Luang Pho Krū Gambhīrsān (no date) and confirmed by Professors Balee Buddharaksa and Sommai Premchit at Chiang Mai University. See also an inscription from 1812 on the monastic library of Wat Phra Singh (Penth, Khruathai and Ketphrom 1998: 177).

6 Hundius offers here the intriguing and certainly possible suggestion that there might have been a political reason behind Krūpā Kañcana arranging a project to which both the royal leaders of Luang Phrabang and Phrae could contribute. An inscription and a manuscript colophon reveal that the king of Luang Phrabang directly supported Kañcana in 1836. This demonstrates clearly that the provinces of Nan and Phrae in Northern Thailand were often intellectually more influenced by Luang Phrabang than Chiang Mai. The modern political border often obscures these long-term intellectual relations. See also Wyatt (1998: 71–7).

7 Kengtung itself was a regional center for monastic education. The *Tamnan Pa Daeng* (Mangrai edition) has a passage that reads, "Many hill people came down to take the sāsanā back to every hill and mountain. Some of them came down to study and learn correctly and thoroughly [the study of the Dhamma, its meaning, the letters of the alphabet, the canon and grammar (*pariyatti attha akkara byañjana Pāli sadda*)] and returned home to teach pupils and disciples." I thank Daniel Veidlinger for pointing out this passage to me.

8 One trick occurred after the local prince of Kengtung overheard this strange response and told his army to search throughout Kengtung for a monastery with this name or with a thick wall. They could not find it and the frustrated prince ordered one of his officers to cut a coconut in half and scrape out all the meat. One half he gave to the prince and one half he placed in Mahāthera Kesarapañño's alms bowl and giggling told the monk to enjoy the sweet coconut meat and after he was finished to make sure not to lose the hard shell. Soon after this, Mahāthera Kesarapañño left and returned to Wat Lai Hin. The army officer followed him and seven months later, he entered Wat Lai Hin and asked Mahāthera Kesarapañño – "do you still have the coconut shell?" To his surprise, the reply was "sure, it is under my pillow, let me go fetch it." He soon did and told the army officer to invite the prince of Kengtung to visit Wat Lai Hin and compare his half of the shell to see if they were a match. Soon the prince did come and was surprised when they were a perfect match.

9 High quality Pāli manuscripts were produced though even after the "golden age" of Pāli literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If we just look at *Dhammapada* manuscripts, we see this activity. For example, there is a manuscript from 1583 from Wat Lai Hin, another from Wat Doi Kaeo in Chiang Mai with one *phūk* and 99 folios, Another from Wat Kāsa in Chiang Rai with one *phūk* and 109 folios composed in 1647. There are also three rare manuscripts, which contain only Pāli verses. These were used by Hinüber and Norman (1994) for their Pāli Text Society edition. One from 1786 has one *phūk*, 57 folios, and was found at Wat Lai Hin. It is missing verses 319 to 343. Another is from 1611 (Wat Lai Hin) and is almost complete. In Lampang Province, we find a great deal of *Dhammapada* manuscripts from the early to mid-eighteenth century that range widely in size and content. Most are vernacular *nissaya* type manuscripts with mixed local and Indic narratives in idiosyncratic order, but many are Pāli manuscripts.

10 Another inscription from Doi Tung composed in 1605 (on the base of a statue of a *ṛṣi* and salutes the enshrining of Buddhist relics at Doi Tung) uses three different scripts and two languages. A mixture of Northern Thai (Yuan) and Fakkham was employed for the dating and main text of the inscription that describes the history of the *ṛṣi* and the relic. This text is in Thai. The Shan script is used for Pāli. It shows a population of mixed ethnicity. It also shows that there was no standard rule on the use of certain scripts for vernacular or classical languages. Even if the person who wrote the Pāli was unable to write in another script, he obviously had no reservations about using a local script. Furthermore, if the person who wrote the main inscription was the same as the person who wrote the Pāli, then he did not use the Northern Thai script that is often believed to be script reserved for Pāli texts. This period of Northern Thai history in the areas of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Nan, etc. saw the production of many inscriptions. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there were mostly inscriptions with Pāli and Thai sections in various scripts and later after the 1450's became almost solely inscribed in Thai using the Northern Thai, Lao or Sukhothai-Thai scripts.

11 These are vernacular and Pāli narratives. *Nipāta* most likely refers to chapters of the *Jātakas* and *niyai* are folktales or stories drawn from *Jātakas*. *Nikāya* most likely refers to *suttantas*, *abhidhamma* and *vinaya* works. The list of these manuscripts (532 fascicles) can be seen as an appendix in Wyatt's translation (Wyatt 1998).

12 One man from the Fang District of Northern Chiang Mai province offered to sell me over a dozen medical texts from his father's collection. I declined the offer telling him to preserve or donate his father's materials.

13 See Center for the Promotion of Art and Culture, Chiang Mai University. MS.# LP 0470008100.

14 Oskar von Hinüber's article, "Chips from Buddhist Worskshops," (1996) Harald Hundius' (1991) study of colophons, and Daniel Veidlinger's recent work (2006) on the history of writing in Northern Thailand show that the reasons behind patronage, merit making, as well as scribal work habits and training were non-standardized. These studies show that manuscripts in the region are rarely longer than fifteen fascicles, often incomplete, rarely have tables of contents, are often devoid of extensive colophons, and the scribe usually aspires to be reborn in the age of the Metteyya or Future Buddha.

15 See the introduction to Jackson (1986).

9 Emending perfection

Prescript, postscript, and practice in Newar Buddhist manuscript culture[1]

Christoph Emmrich

Prescript

Though Nepal and the Kathmandu Valley may be a remote place for most people, not just when viewed from North America and Europe, but also from most parts of Asia, almost everybody who works on Sanskrit or Tibetan manuscripts and particularly Buddhist ones is bound to give a closer look at what lies in such places as the National Archives, the Kaisar, or the Asha Libraries in Kathmandu. The historically, socially, religiously, and ethnically heterogeneous community of the Kathmandu Valley—which for most of its history was simply called the people of Nepal and only over the last few centuries has come to be called the Newars—is the main agent behind the wealth of texts that have been brought, produced, reproduced, handed down, maintained, collected, and made available, not to mention used, read, and followed within the Valley and beyond. The particular culture developed within the Valley clearly extends far beyond manuscripts. Its most visible products are to be found in town planning, architecture, and generally the visual arts, much of it being reflected in the artistic and visual side of local manuscript production. Moreover, the manuscript culture of the Valley itself extends far beyond its own cultural boundaries, including so much of what are the literature and the manuscript culture of India and Tibet. The Valley's communities have been both conscientious facilitators as well as creative innovators.

When we talk about Newar Buddhist manuscript culture, we have to keep in mind the breadth implied in the transfers of this kind, the heterogeneity of diverse traditions in intense exchange within a small place, and the power that local claims acquire under conditions of economic and intellectual wealth. Thus, it is necessary to try to and isolate certain partial traditions when dealing with manuscript culture, which mainly implies abstracting from the rich osmosis of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhist and Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava manuscript practice, particularly in the fields of poetry and ritual. If one were to outline a Newar Buddhist manuscript culture, one would have to differentiate genres of literature, their manuscripts, the ways of their production and maintenance, and the cultures, they thus produce and in which they are embedded. Such works comprise prescriptive texts (ritual manuals, iconography, etc.); the pragmatics of the handbook, lyrical, dramatic, and narrative literature (court poetry and tantric songs, court drama, *avadāna*, etc.); the display

of text in illuminations; historical texts (*vaṃśāvalī, purāṇa*, accountant's records, etc.); legal documents, as well as doctrinal texts (*sūtras, tantras*, etc.); and their role in the worship of texts as deities in a culture where the energies invested in the care of the manuscript markedly outweigh those of textual exegesis. Of course, recent trends among Buddhist Newars may at times contradict this view.[2] Finally, one would also have to look at the practice of archiving and restricted or public use, from temple and private libraries, to the efforts of noblemen, merchants, and government officials culminating in the establishment of the institutions mentioned in the introductory lines and finding its current form in projects of digitization and distribution in the academic sphere.

And yet, if one were to attempt to show how Newar Buddhist manuscript culture works today and how it might have worked in the past, it may be more effective to examine a particular case that centers on one specific Buddhist manuscript and the practices that revolve around it.

Dealing with the prescript

The text we are dealing with in this study is the manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* ("The Perfection of Insight in Eight Thousand [Verses]," henceforth ASP, when referring to the *ms.*, not the deity) in the possession of the guild (Nep. *guṭhi*) in charge of the text affiliated to the temple of Kvābāhāḥ, which goes by the Sanskrit name of Hiraṇavarṇamahāvihāra, or the "Golden Temple," and which is one of the most important Buddhist shrines in Lalitpur (also known as Pāṭan or Yala in Newār[3]) in the Kathmandu Valley of Central Nepal. The manuscript is part of the temple treasure and is preserved in the main, exoteric shrine devoted to Buddha Śākyamnuni of Kvābāhāḥ. While Kvābāhāḥ is not the only Newar religious institution in possession of manuscripts of the same text, an elaborate cult centred on the public reading of the text that survives to the present day has developed only here.[4]

The practice called the "reading of the text" (New. *pā thyākegu*[5]) consists of a morning reading of the entire text performed by ten members of the temple, all of whom have gone through full tantric consecration (New. *acā luyegu*) and possess the family rights to perform such a reading. This practice is also held to effect wellbeing (Skt. *śāntipūjā*) in the name of the sponsor or his or her representative, and it is performed by the family priest. Further, one member of the guild, assisted by another, is responsible for the handling of the manuscript and the paraphernalia which come with it, such as a guilt brass container, the sealing implements and a magnificent stand, known as the "Lion Throne" (Skt. *siṃhāsana*) on which the manuscript or both its covers and needles are placed during certain sections of its worship. Its handling prior and successive to worship consists of bringing out the manuscript from the main temple shrine, breaking the seal and opening the container, unwrapping the convolute, placing the manuscript or its covers and needles on the Lion Throne in front of the main priest, dividing up and distributing the text pages (minus the illuminated folios) among the readers (though this is often performed by the sponsor himself), eventually collecting,

compiling, reordering, and wrapping the manuscript pages, resealing the container and bringing the manuscript back into the Śākyamuni shrine. In most cases, a performance is undertaken once, sometimes twice a day to avert ill fortune, particularly on planned trips or entrepreneurial negotiations, illness or interpersonal conflicts, to reinforce a vow, to grant a wish or as a representation of gratitude for the happy outcome of critical situations.[6] On the morning of the reading, the participants are supposed to fast and only after the completion of the performance are they allowed to eat and drink again.

It is said that the manuscript was copied by a scribe named Ānanda Bhikṣu from Kapitanagar in 1225 (i.e., N.S. 345 according to the Newār calendar) during the reign of King Abhaya Malla (Sakya and Vaidya 1970: 19–20).[7] The colophon, however, has a date equivalent to 1125 (N.S. 245), which according to Sakya und Vaidya was made to replace the later date during one of the recurring renovations of the manuscript (Sakya and Vaidya 1970: 19). The same, earlier date is found in the Buddhist chronicle generally known as the "Wright Chronicle" (Wright 1877: 159), which suggests that this source may have been the basis for the change made in the manuscript. The place mentioned in the colophon, Kapitanagar, has not been identified (Gellner 1992: 233, n. 27). Legends narrating the origins of the manuscript and its arrival at Kvābāhāḥ concur in mentioning a Brahmin who is said to have brought it to Bubāhāḥ, a Lalitpur Buddhist shrine about half a kilometer away from Kvābāhāḥ, from where it is said to have been delivered to its present site (Gellner 1992: 233–35). Members of Michubāhāḥ in the neighbourhood of Kvābāhāḥ claim the manuscript owned by their shrine to be the template of the Kvābāhāḥ copy. The colophon of the manuscript preserved there which gives 1011 (N.S. 131), a distinctly earlier date, would not contradict this claim (Sakya and Vaidya 1970: 1–2). For our discussion, it is important to note that the claims of the members of Michubāhāḥ extend to suggesting that their manuscript should be used as the model for the recurring restorations of the Kvābāhāḥ copy or even replace it in the performances held at the Golden Temple (Gellner 1992: 235).

The manuscript currently in use at Kvābāhāḥ is inscribed in golden letters on 325 folios consisting of 55 × 14 cm black strips of cloth and paper covered with wax. The first four folios contain illuminations with images of Buddha Śākyamuni's hagiography as well as of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā as Tārā. The last 25 folios comprise the colophon, which includes details on the many restorations of the manuscript, allowing us to follow the history of the reworking the manuscript has undergone up to the present date. They document the restorations listed by Sakya and Vaidya dating to the years 1603 (N.S. 723), 1912 (N.S. 1032), 1943 (N.S. 1063) as well as 1960 (N.S. 1080) (Sakya and Vaidya 1970: 19). The year 1664 (N.S. 784) given by Sakya and Vaidya does not appear, instead we find the following years not mentioned by Sakya and Vaidya: 1627 (N.S. 747), 1922 (N.S. 1042) and 1972 (N.S. 1092). Gellner reads the restoration dates as proof for an intensification of the ritual employment of the manuscript in the seventeenth century and a decrease in the intensity of this activity in the successive period. It is only in the nineteenth century that attention as represented by prominent religious practice connected to donations seems to have moved back to the manuscript: 1828 (N.S. 948) saw the

donation of the metal container, 1859 (N.S. 979) its covering with gold, and 1900 (N.S. 1020) the appearance of the Lion Throne (Gellner 1992: 236).

However, it is only in the time of Gellner's fieldwork at Kvābāhāḥ that one may recognize a veritable explosion of renovative activity. During my first visits in August 2004 the colophon included, apart from the renovation observed by Gellner in February 1983 (N.S. 1103) (Gellner 1992: 236), proof of restorations in the years N.S. 1108, 1113 and 1119. While renovations had occurred every 20–30 years between the nineteenth century and Gellner's visit, the one observed by me in 2004 (N.S. 1124) was already the fourth within a period of twenty years, and the last intervention to date documented in the colophone and observed by me in 2007 (N.S. 1127) would be a further sign of increased frequency.[8] Gellner assumes that the practice of the ritual reading of the text in its present form is "an example of religious innovation—change," which does not predate the beginning of the nineteenth century and goes hand-in-hand with the rise of Kvābāhāḥ as the dominant Buddhist shrine of Lalitpur (Gellner 1992: 236).

The maintenance of cultic buildings or objects, particularly at specific places, such as *caitya*s or *stūpa*s, temples, images, and manuscripts is a basic form of Buddhist piety. Hence, the irregularly periodical restoration of the ASP manuscript of Kvābāhāḥ is not only a practical means of maintaining of an intensively used ritual artifact but rather an integral part of the cult itself, and for that a particularly meritorious form of ritual engagement with the text and with the bodhisattva it embodies. The perceived need for the maintenance of the text goes hand-in-hand with the growing interest on behalf of the community affiliated with the temple in both the performance of the ritual reading as well as in practice of restoring the manuscript. These set in motion a twofold process: the more the text is used in the performance of the ritual it commands, the more heavily the manuscript is subjected to wear and tear and the more rationale there is to engage in its ritual restoration.

Yet there are ample opportunities for merit making apart from the material maintenance of the manuscript, as the donations of the metal container and the Lion Throne show. As we will see, merit making gives rise to a dynamic that effects change on both the manuscript and the text that, following the idea of the immutability of canonized texts in general and of the Buddha's word in particular, otherwise resist change. The history of the manuscript's decay provides the opportunity for its meritorious and glorious restoration. The donor accumulates merit thanks to his investment into the value, the beauty and the effulgence, which the object of veneration risks losing and of which it cannot have enough. The renovation of the decaying original is driven by the will to restore a grandeur that has been ascribed to it and in which the donor can share. The text is not meant to become "more original," it is meant to become "better." The prescriptions of canon and of donation both leave their traces in the practice that intervenes in the medium and the body of the manuscript and the text version it presents. It thereby performs a rewriting of the text, which I will term "postscript."

Writing the postscript

I first attended a restoration (Skt. *jīrṇoddhāra*[9]) of the Kvābāhāḥ manuscript in 2004 (N.S. 1124) from 18 July to 15 August.[10] It took place every day from 9:30 am to about 1 pm. It was followed by lunch in the attic of the shrine and was shared by all the men who had participated on that day, the menu including alcohol and meat, besides vegetable stew and rice. The work had thus been timed to fall within the intercalary month (New. *analā*, Skt. *adhikamāsa*) prescribed for that year—a month in which certain ritual activities, including the reading of the text, are prohibited for reasons of inauspiciousness. That year the restoration had been donated by Devraj Shakya, who had been very successful with trade business in Tibet and had shouldered the expenses for the work, particularly the bill for the 11.66 grams of gold for the ink used to redraw the damaged or otherwise faulty lettering. In addition, Devraj's wife had donated a pair of earrings, wherein the act of donating jewellery—particularly earrings—in devotional activities among Newar Buddhists signifies the precept to refrain from wearing jewelry. Prior to the beginning of the restoration the spiritual essence of the Prajñāpāramitā deity was extracted from the manuscript into a ritual pitcher, thereby turning the text, as I was repeatedly assured over the period of the restoration, into a lifeless aggregate of paper, cloth, and paint. The analogy to ("de-" or "re-") consecration practices prescribed for buildings and images is fundamental and shall be referred to further along in this study.[11]

At 7:00 am, the manuscript was taken out of the Śākyamuni shrine and the rite was performed where the reading ceremony has been regularly held since the early 90s, in front of the small shrine dedicated to Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara on the elevated ground floor of the tracts opening toward and surrounding the temple's inner courtyard. Subsequently, the ASP was placed on a low table where the text was worshipped receiving coin and uncooked, husked rice offerings and being touched with the right hands and foreheads of devotees, usually on their morning round to the shrine. In the following days, this procedure would be repeated, without repeating the extraction of the text's life essence. Over the whole restoration period, the first artisans involved in the restoration would arrive shortly after 8:00 am and start preparing the utensils, setting up the working tables on which the folios were placed during the readings, and mixing the paint. A more senior member of the guild joined them bringing along the boiled up solvent. The pigment consisting of gold dust (New. *cvaluṃ*) is absorbed by a viscous, turbid, and gelatinous liquid produced by cooking the fins and scales of a carp (New. *kayṃ nyā*) and linseeds (New. *tichi pvu*). Furthermore, felt and ballpoint pens, black ink, brushes, glue, and scissors were made available. Just before 9:00 am, Dinesh Shakya, a junior member of the artisan group and responsible for handling the manuscript removed the book needles and removed the covers, which remained displayed for worship on the small table, and distributed the leaves to be worked on during the day.

Throughout the morning, temple visitors and pilgrims came to pay their obeisance and make their offerings to the text-deity. Some, mostly Tibetans, Sikkimese,

or Bhutanese, be they pilgrims, tourists, or exiles, contacted the artisans and were directed to the senior guild members if they wanted to make a more considerable contribution to the restoration effort. Among others, I witnessed the donation of a Tibetan woman from Bouddha, Kathmandu, who handed over small quantities of gold dust wrapped in paper on behalf of her male relatives. In these cases, the guild member registered the donor's name and residence, as well as the kind and value of the donation in Nepalese rupees in his accounting register.

Guild members, most of them senior and without artisanal qualifications, sat in seats along the outer wall facing the inner courtyard and worked on the material of the folios. They constituted a changing group of which only one or two would be present regularly. Binay Dhakwa Shakya, who at that time was observing mortuary vows and was accordingly wearing white, as well as the octogenarian Mangalratna Shakya were the most regular attendees.[12] This group consisted of the eleven senior-most men of the temple from the Śākya caste, in distinction from the group of readers who were all initiated and practicing *vajrācārya*s. It was their task to prepare the folios for the work of the calligraphists by repairing the worn-out edges. They completed, mended, and solidified them by folding and attaching black strips of paper and cloth that had been smeared with glue (New. *sares*) made in the traditional way. The folio margin between the edge and the lettering amounted to approximately 4 cm and was occasionally pasted over rather generously with textile and emplastic, sometimes covering sections of the text that would later warrant reconstructive action by the calligraphists.

On the other hand, they took great care in removing black adhesive strips from some of the folios that, according to Binay Dhakwa Shakya, had been used during the previous restoration and had apparently damaged the manuscript. It was now being replaced by less invasive materials, Binay termed "biological." The kind of paper employed (New./Tib. *lhop kha*) had been brought from Tibet by a lama, and negotiations were under way to obtain this kind of paper on a regular basis. We find here the belief in the advantages of technological progress when dealing with the challenges posed by the materiality of the manuscript, its handling, and its conservation. Past techniques of restoration, which at the time of their application had been possibly considered optimal or at least as adequate, are viewed as inadequate or even harmful, and the attempt to reverse their perceived effects becomes a crucial part of the restoration process. The crooked paths of modernization—from the duct tape of the eighties and nineties to early twenty-first-century eco-gum—leave their traces in the will to restore which demands nothing less than the best and newest the market has to offer.

A further operation carried out by the nonspecialists, however, only after the calligraphists had completed their work on a folio, was to polish (New. *lasaṃ dhayagu*, or *lasā bvigu*, Nep. *koṭnu*) their surfaces. This was done by using a polishing stone (New. *lasaṃ phva*), which was an agate (New. *hakha*, Nep. *musu*, bzw. *hakib*) acquired in Rajasthan. The folio was placed on one of the small reading tables and rubbed in quick and vigorous strokes with the flat side of the semiprecious stone so that the softened wax would spread evenly over the black and golden lettered surface and turn the page smooth and shiny.

Between the first and the second rows of columns from the shrine of Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara, eight of the small reading tables had been joined to form a large surface on which the calligraphists sat and worked on the manuscript. Between them and the first row of columns was a table to deposit those folios that were not being used. All folios had a small tag stuck to the needle hole on which the pagination, occasionally omitted by the manuscript, had been added with a felt pen. Between the calligraphists and the second row of columns, burning incense sticks were placed, which were lit every morning and kept burning during working hours. The calligraphists were young men working in the arts and craft sector and specializing in scripts, painting, or working with gold, who are experienced in using metal based colors and are familiar with the huge range of Newar scripts, particularly the highly ornamental variant known as *rañjaná lipi*,[13] which is applied to artefacts and inscriptions both in Nepal and throughout the Tibetan cultural area and which is the script used for the Kvābāhāḥ manuscript. The group was led by the most senior and experienced artist called Sudhan Shakya.[14] The restoration process itself would begin by one of the calligraphists in charge of a certain number of folios reviewing the individual pages line by line. In doing this, he used phosphor-colored felt pens. Depending on the seniority of the artist and on the degree of corruption, he would consult with a fellow calligraphist before applying the mark. After having determined the kind of corruption and the appropriate measures to be taken for its emendation the missing section, usually gold paint that had cracked or fallen off, was reapplied in gold paint with a fine brush by placing the folio on either a glass pane or a copper plate. Passages, which were redrawn wrongly in this process and if the mistake was identified by a fellow calligraphist the mistake was undone by applying black ink and redrawing the lettering after it had dried.

In all cases, where single illegible letters (New. *ākhaḥ*, Skt. *akṣara*) and words (New/Skt. *śabda*) had been corrected, the relevant passages were again proofread by the senior members of the team. According to Sudhan Shakya, an inexperienced calligraphist could finish about five corrupted folios per day (including going through the noncorrupted folios), while an experienced one could manage as many as twelve. In all cases, Sudhan was taken to be the highest authority, and he would occasionally interfere and give his view on whether an emendation was necessary and how it should be done. Questions and instructions ranged from the proper reading of a sign and how to redraw it properly if it had either vanished or had been drawn wrongly at an earlier stage in the history of the manuscript to the addition or elimination of entire words and even passages which had been identified as scribal errors (Fig. 9.2). It is here that the question arises over the basis on which these emendations should be undertaken.

The postscript's prescription

While going through the manuscript in search for flaws most calligraphists kept a bound photocopy of Vaidya's 1960 critical edition of the ASP (henceforth "ASP (Vaidya)"),[15] on their laps (Fig 9.1). Indeed, this was the model according

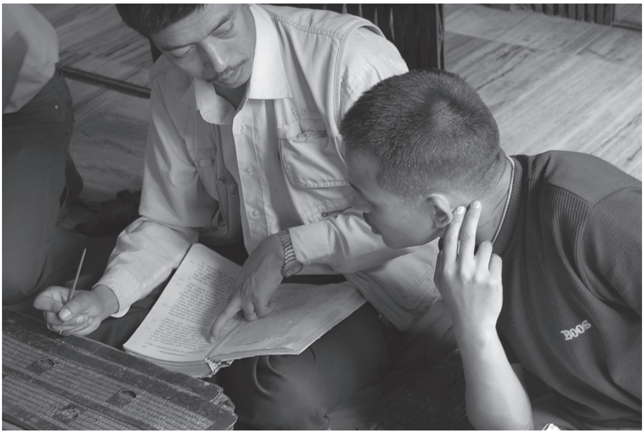


Figure 9.1 The calligraphists Dinesh Bajracharya, with ASP (Vaidya) on his lap, and Ashtaman Shakya, to his left, discussing a change in the ASP (Kvābāhāḥ). (Photo Christoph Emmrich, 2007.)

to which the senior calligraphists turned when they were doubtful about a faintly delineated letter, a misspelt word or an entire variant passage and on the basis of which changes were made to the manuscript, henceforth "ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) (Figure 9.1)." They did so in differing degrees of intensity, some of them sometimes looking up the passage in the critical edition when a doubt crept up while scanning the manuscript, some actually comparing the whole text line by line and making emendations on the basis of every divergence they would find between the edition and the manuscript. In the following section, I would like to present a sample of interventions made by the artists.

- ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) 232 received a footnote inserting *adṛṣṭa* on the basis of ASP (Vaidya) R. 384, which runs *adṛṣṭa vā avinditaṃ vā*, while *adṛṣṭa* did not figure in ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) 232 in this passage.
- ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) 235 apparently had a *na gacchati* added to the phrase *sarvadharmā nāgacchati ajanāmi* turning it into *sarvadharmā nāgacchati na gacchati ajanāmi* some time prior to the ongoing 2004 restoration. The additional *na gacchati* was again erased, i.e. covered with black ink by Sudhan on the basis of ASP (Vaidya) W 876.
- ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) 240 *yasmin samaye bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ* underwent the insertion of *subhute* to *yasmin samaye subhute bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ* on the basis of ASP (Vaidya) W 889. Sudhan added to the right of *samaye* below the line a small circle to mark the footnote.
- ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) 244 *evaṃ śūnyatānimittaprānimitteṣu* received an additional *ca śroṣit* turning it into *evaṃ ca śro ṣit śūnyatānimittaprānimitteṣu* on the basis of ASP (Vaidya) W 238. Sudhan added the two words on

the upper margin of the folio and inserted a “4” behind them as a marker for line 4.

– ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) 295 featured *ku[ra?]lekhitām kṛtvā* in the sentence *pustake pravyaktapravyatair kṣaraiḥ kuralekhitām krtvā* which was emended by Sudhan to *sulekhitam kṛtvā* on the basis of ASP (Vaidya) W 990.

Referring to the numerous glosses on the margins stemming from previous restorations Sudhan stated that such emendations were nothing out of the ordinary but were part of the restoration process. He added that not finding any errors (New. *dvaṃ*) meant that one would have to check more thoroughly, because it was indispensable to find and eliminate these errors. Additionally, he was convinced that the longer one would search, the more mistakes one would find[16]. I was not able to determine how long ASP (Vaidya) has been used for the restorations. Hemraj only said that they had used the edition already for the last two or three rounds, a fact that was confirmed by Sudhan. Gellner’s 2001 reprint of his article, which does not touch upon the restoration practice, features a photo of a lonely senior calligraphist working on the ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) on a single small table, documenting, what I was told, that past restoration efforts involved less manpower. Gellner’s caption to the photo points to the original volume of Vaidya’s edition, which can be seen lying next to folios of ASP (Kvābāhāḥ), making the picture the earliest historical proof of the existence of the current practice.

Before they started to use ASP (Vaidya) for restorations, Sudhan said that they had used diverse *mss.* owned by Kvābāhaḥ and spent a lot of time discussing which of them was the most accurate. I was referred to a red and yellow shrine-like container made of glass and wrought iron with *aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* written on it, placed at the far end of the hall in which the restoration took place and which contained a small collection of printed versions of the ASP. In addition, the bound photocopies of ASP (Vaidya) used for the restoration would be placed back into this container once the restoration work was complete. Sudhan explained that since they have come to rely on a text recognized by various scholars to be very good (New. *bhiṃgu*, lit. “of good quality”), there were no more discussions about accuracy. More importantly, this text was better than the mss. owned by other shrines in Lalitpur, whose representatives had regularly demanded that their version be taken as the model for restorations, as seen in the claims to seniority made by Michubāhāḥ. Binay mentioned additional advantages of ASP (Vaidya) as being “handy” and “legible.” When I asked whether ASP (Vaidya) more correctly represented the way it should be and that it was “right” (New. *pāychi*) while ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) in its current state was “not right” (New. *mapāychi*), Hemraj interjected that this was irrelevant, adding: “But all are the same. The Prajñāpāramitā is the same.” (“*tara sabbai ustai cha. prajñāparamitā ustai cha”*).

The most extraordinary feature of this process is that a *ms.* possibly dating back to the thirteenth century is emended on the basis of a twentieth-century critical edition. Moreover, this was not a one-off event, but it has become part of the renovation practice of this temple. Admittedly, this may be viewed as less dramatic in the light of the fact that these restorations have been going on for a

very long time, and that interferences with the state of the text at the time of its writing are part and parcel of the history of its conservation. Interfering with the thirteenth-century version of the manuscript by intervening on the body of the text is not only permissible, it is actually required, at least judging from the statements made by the persons involved in the restoration. We do not know, however, which measures were taken in the earlier upgrades, or whether the scope, the form, and the intensity of restorative interventions may have changed, developed or increased over time. We do not know whether there used to be a more conservative attitude towards changes in the wording of the text.

What becomes clear from the elementary practice observable today is that the boundaries between redrawing a letter and changing a word are blurred by the very fact that there is an argument about it, that references to authorities are necessary to settle the dispute and that the textual knowledge (based less on oral recitation and mnemonic practice rather than "canonical" agreement) and the institutions to produce and enforce it have all but disappeared from the intellectual life of the temple community and of Newar Buddhist society at large. Bringing in a text produced by a Western academic technology may however be read as an attempt to re-establish such an authority and develop new kinds of lineages and institutions. All we know is that the pool of possible texts interfering with the ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) version until the introduction of ASP (Vaidya) were restricted to the variant manuscripts available within the network of affiliated or competing temples within Lalitpur. If there was much greater editorial intervention, it was marked, mediated or facilitated by the employment of the critical edition. It is the awareness of the temple community that textual intervention is part manuscript maintenance and care of the deity that leads to the decision of referring to ASP (Vaidya) in the first place.

The advantages drawn from the use of ASP (Vaidya) for the emendations in ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) become clearer, if one considers the importance of the deity and its embodiment and the role of Kvābāhāḥ in the community of affiliated and competing shrines. To refer back to a text which has neither a place in the traditional topography of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Newar Buddhism nor a date in the historiography and ritual practice of textual lineages, and which cannot be claimed by a competing temple to produce derivation and dependence or to warrant negotiations and settlements, removes Kvābāhāḥ from the shared domain of potential contestation. Further, claiming a product of the western philological knowledge system instrumentalizes a technology that is part of a larger technological system, which may be viewed as positive, but is definitely recognized as effective and powerful ideologically and politically. In their restorations, the Kvābāhāḥ community is backed, so to speak, by the international academic community. Of course, the polyvalence of "science" and its multiple representations in medicine, chemistry, engineering, and media, to name only four of its most important forms as witnessed in South Asian everyday life, must have undergone a process of translation to be able to imbue a critical edition with the same aura.

The complex historical developments of rationalized and scientific versions and forms of Buddhism in several Asian Buddhist countries over the last century have



Figure 9.2 Sudhan Shakya working on particularly divergent passages in ASP (Kvābāhāḥ). (Photo Christoph Emmrich, 2007.)

thoroughly informed the Newar elites responsible for communicating the value of Western Buddhist studies. The text-critical method, and in its own way its products, however, appear as attractive in a very different way than models from the natural sciences employed for the re-reading of Buddhist doctrines (Figure 9.2). It, so to speak, flies below the ideological radar, carrying no obvious message, be it religious or other. It enforces no alien terminology, ironically coming it seems without a language of its own and requiring no translation. Instead, the critical edition comes across as embedded with a special aura supported by its technological paraphernalia, most prominently—the critical apparatus.

Obviously, this notion only applies to a certain degree and depends on the actual degree of use and appropriation of the method and its products. In our case, the product—Vaidya's edition—is used in a very restricted way by comparing ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) exclusively with the constituted text, and, at least so far, leaving out references to the critical apparatus, except for rare comments by senior calligraphists. It is on the institutional level that such important figures such as the activist Min Bahadur Shakya and his Nāgārjuna Institute, the late Herakaji Bajracharya and excellent young scholars such as Manik Bajracharya affiliated with the Lotus Research Centre have managed not only to establish an awareness of the value of western philological work, but to communicate and institutionalize both their own efforts in this direction and the advantages that the appreciation and implementation of these methods and products can have on concrete Buddhist practice. Lastly, and on a different functional and representational level, the philologically produced text is attractive because of the layout and the material form in which it is used. Preface, bibliography, abbreviations, superscript numbers and pagination in roman numbers, extensive footnotes, and the constituted text presented in justified paragraphs with indented verses differs

markedly from the layout of a Newar *leporello* (New. *tyāsaphū*) or the large folios of ASP (Kvābāhāḥ).

Further, a "xeroxed" text held together with a spiral binding and thus a product of the copy shop cannot come close to competing with a manuscript written in golden letters and adorned by miniatures, embedded in an elaborate ritual complex including restoration practice and with a place and a history as venerable as ASP (Kvābāhāḥ). It is a reference work comparable, possibly, in its present use, to a sketchbook of an artist trained in Newar or Tibetan visual arts containing iconometric, stylistic, and semantic notation, which in itself does not carry the charisma, but is indispensable for the transmission of forms, norms and techniques that serve to produce charismatic artefacts. In this sense, ASP (Vaidya) is the "prescript" for the "postscript" ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) produced in the practice of restoration. A noncharismatic variant of ASP shows how the charismatic variant, which has been removed from its cultic context and whose charisma has been suspended, ought to look. It is in this context that Hemraj's comment on the sameness of all ASPs makes sense, as it would imply that one cannot separate the prescript from the postscript, that model and token, image and afterimage, that uncharismatic edition and charismatic temple treasure as well as all its forms and variants are doctrinally inseparable. The comment on sameness also makes sense in that the practitioners avoid tying themselves up in knots when engaging in this restoration practice. On the level of the history of salvation ("Heilsgeschichte"), these manuscripts, prints, and inscriptions are identical down to their wording. This would imply that only for the time of the restoration is this notion of identity suspended, and that after the completion of the effort the restored manuscript returns to the community of identical texts, though as a charismatic one that due to its place, its role and agency and the effort undertaken on its behalf is, in an eminent sense, a *caitya*.[17]

On the other hand, one could read the claim that all ASPs are the same as the precondition for making changes in the charismatic text at the top of the hierarchy. The essential identification of all texts allows us to see their variations as "details," mere scratches and smudges which only need some occasional polishing. It also denies the intertextual space between versions across which the emendation takes place and which defines it, turning the process of correction into something that happens not between texts but within the thus assumed large identical body of the only version ever. The conflation of all versions into one as an answer to my question about right or wrong versions precludes questions of difference and undercuts the paradigm of original and copy and merely formulates what the practice of restoration performs. Thus, talking of "corruptions" when referring those passages that required intervention and change, at least in the philological sense of the word, would be misleading, as this would presuppose that the agents of that change would aim at restoring the "original." The restoration does not restore the original manuscript that made its way to Kvābāhāḥ, nor does it aim to become like the Michubāhāḥ version, nor is it transformed into Vaidya's and Mitra's reconstituted *Ur*-text, and it is obviously far from wanting to be a critical edition. Although the manuscript may have at some point closely resembled the

other manuscripts in which it was brought into contact, and although the series of most recent restorations will turn it into something very close to ASP (Vaidya), the issue of resemblance is secondary. The restorative effort aims not toward the particular shape that the manuscript takes in certain context-text-historical constellations, but rather emphasizes the techniques employed and the value these techniques confer on practice and practitioners. In this light, even talking about "mistakes" (New. *dvaṃ*), as the calligraphists do, reveals the complexity of the undertaking. The mistake would have to be defined as that which does not agree with the particular model one is referring to at this historical stage of the restoration or as that feature in the textual part of the manuscript that prompts an intervention.

Returning to the question of what is actually done to the manuscript, the effort, it seems, is not so much about improving the manuscript in a functional sense than about taking care of it. A new layer of gold on the book container, the addition of a new ritual requisite such as the Lion Throne, even a redrawn letter does not make the text better, but it maintains it for the period between one restoration and the next. One could venture even further and say that the periodical restorations can be compared to the daily bathing and clothing of the image of Buddha Śākyamuni in the main shrine, which do not make the image better, which do not even maintain it in a physical way, but ought to be done in the devotional sense of care and service. This may very well be doctrinally justified as recurring acts of ritual purification and thus have to do with the "life of the image." If one should want to speak of improvement in the sense of including the positivistic, modernist slant—possibly already part of whatever one may want to call the "premodern," it is not the ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) that is improved. The manuscript as text and as deity cannot be improved, rather it is the techniques of its care that can and must be improved.

On the penultimate day of the work in process, Ashtaman Shakya wrote the colophon onto a new folio. The colophon mentioned place and time, the ruling monarch, his queen, and the crown prince as well as the names of the eleven elders and the eight calligraphists involved in the restoration. On the last day, 3 August, 2004, Dinesh Shakya implemented a decision to paste squares flaps of semi-transparent paper attached just above the manuscript's illuminations found in the first folios, as I was told, for protective purposes, recalling publications of modern Western and East Asian art. This major intervention in the materiality and desighn of the manuscript suggests an "art-historification" of its more visual elements and dramatically mirrors the "philologization" in dealing with the text. In a final step of the procedure, Ashtaman Shakya went over choice passages of the gold lettering, polishing them with a stylus bearing an agate point. The concluding reassembling of the manuscript using the two needles revealed that one side of the manuscript block was taller than the other, probably, as Sudhan explained, due to the more extensive use of patches on that side of several folios. On 4 August, the calligraphists jointly proofread the entire manuscript with five *vajrācāryas* who were particularly familiar with the text. Here attention was directed primarily at the emended passages and a handful of further instances were discussed, which resulted in additional interventions. According to Binay Dhakwa Shakya, this last

stage of the process was crucial as the senior priests, on the basis of their experience and authority, would still be able to find mistakes.

The pragmatic and complex attitude towards "mistakes" in the manuscript can be further elaborated when confronting Binay's statement with that of Sudhan above. Both seem to share the attitude that when working on the manuscript, mistakes cannot ever be completely excluded. There can thus be no final and definitive proof reading. Moreover, if one takes into account the never-ending challenges of material wear and tear, there can be no final restoration even of the manuscript's text either. Although he does not say it, Sudhan's work shows that it is obviously renovation itself that produces mistakes. I hardly witnessed any discussion following the discovery of a suspected mistake, any evaluation about the reasons for their occurrence, any interest in identifying patterns or common causes behind various faults, and no attempt at developing a method for detecting mistakes. It appears to be crucial that the manuscript in itself—due to its size, age, use, the fact of the word of the Buddha in its corporeal aspect being subject to the laws of an impermanent world, and, finally, due to its own charisma—is perceived as an inexhaustible source of errors that yield inexhaustible opportunities for emendation.

The manuscript thus functions as a field of merit for those involved in its maintenance and care, those who ensure that it can be read and worshipped to its greatest effect. Mistakes are necessary, because the reason for the entire enterprise of restoration lies in their elimination. Hence, mistakes within the text must be understood as only an aspect of a condition that enables and warrants improvement. The thought that the manuscript before its restoration may have been in some form "faulty" or even deviant vis-à-vis a hypothetical original or another version with "less mistakes" is alien to the self-conception of this process. In this sense, it is not canon or canonization that is at stake here. The necessity of a manuscript's improvement as a service to the manuscript itself dissolves the question of right and wrong: how does a manuscript, which is in itself "perfection," become more like itself, become even more perfect? The significance of an individual correction dissolves in the act of correcting. By mirroring the Buddhist history of decay of both manuscript and world, the renovation of ASP is part of the repeated perfection, and thus glorification, of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* as the history of salvation that this practice unfolds.

This history of salvation, however, is always also the history of a place, in this case that of Kvābāhāḥ. The conflict between the prescriptions of textual canonicity and those of restorative donation is decided by a practice dedicated to strengthening a place and thereby its community. Schopen has famously proposed that in analogy to the cult of the *stūpa* as container of the relic also in the development of the cult of the book in early Mahāyāna there were tendencies to place the focus of ritual activity not on the book itself but on the locality surrounding it (Schopen 1975: 170). This does make sense in Kvābāhāḥ, where the temple becomes *bodhimaṇḍa*, the place marked by the announcement of the Dharma (Skt. *dharmaparyāya*), which implies the presence of the Buddha whom all humans and gods not only circumambulate but also choose as their abode.

Schopen admits that this tendency may have been particularly pronounced when there was no material book that could have served as object of worship.[18] The cult observable in Kvābāhāḥ today, the prehistory and development of which one can tentatively reconstruct on the basis of the history of related donations, shows clears signs of an early focus on the manuscript as object that overlaps with forms typical for the cult of the *stūpa*.

Yet, the donations of the book covers, the container, the Lion Throne and the little tables used for the readings and the restoration are also elements of decor assembled around the manuscript, paralleling the donation of gilt roofs and parasols in the case of reliquaries. This decor undoubtedly represents the double vector of organizing secondary materials around a core whose importance they help to develop, of appropriating its environs and to make the core reach out beyond its expanding periphery and connecting it with the complex of ritual agencies at whose disposal it stands. In the ritual performance, the container and the Lion have a role of their own, demand new places, trajectories, and forms of manipulation. However, through these new implements, new ties are established between donors and their families and the center, warranting new obligations and claims. This permanent innovation and expansion of the ritual arena strongly resembles the potential of permanent correction offered by the manuscript. Recalling Schopen's hypothesis of the origins of the Mahāyāna in a multiplicity of individual but related cults surrounding related, but individual texts, one could imagine the history of the series of postscripts of ASP (Kvābāhāḥ) as the constant rewriting of the individual ritual practice as well as of the individual profile of an individual text propelled by its resistance to its own canonization.

Abbreviations

ASP *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*
ASP (Vaidya) *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* ed. Vaidya (see bibliography)
ASP Kvābāhāḥ) *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* ms. in possession of the Kvābāhāḥ (Hiraṇyavarṇa-mahāvihāra), Lalitpur, Nepal
Nep. Nepālī
New. Newār
ONew. Old Newār
N.S. Nepāla Saṃvat
Skt. Sanskrit

Notes

1 My gratitude for having been able to write this piece goes to all the guild members (Nep. *guṭhiyār*s) of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* of Kvābāhāḥ as well as the artists, responsible for the beauty of this manuscript, among whom I was welcomed to conduct my research. I am grateful first and foremost to Binay Dhakwa Shakya and Sudhan Shakya, both of whose invaluable advice and instructions I received regularly and on numerous occasions, particularly during my visits in 2004 and 2007 and whose personal integrity and competence I deeply admire. Earlier results of my ongoing work on this topic

have been published in German as “Die Nachschrift der Vorschrift. Bemerkungen zur rituellen Restaurierung des Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-Manuskripts von Kvābāhāḥ in Lalitpur”. *Im Dickicht der Gebote. Vorschrift und Praxis in Asiatischen Religionen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Buddhismus*. Peter Schalk (ed.). Uppsala: Uppsala University Press. 2005; 285–307.

2 In this context, one should mention the recent developments in Theravāda Buddhism, embraced and propelled mainly by Newars, which makes it difficult to speak of “Newar Buddhism” as only referring to its “traditional” Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna variant, although these developments have taken place after the decline of the manuscript proper and with the rise of the printed text.

3 My choice in favour of “Newār”instead of the older “Newārī” to designate the language spoken by the Newars follows the proposal of the two most recent monographs on Newār linguistics: Hale and Shrestha (2006) and Genetti (2007).

4 David Gellner (1996) has produced the first and so far only elaborate ethnography and historiography of this practice.

5 Also *pā thākegu*, a variant of New. *pāth* (Skt. *pāṭha*) *yākegu*; Gellner (1996: 224).

6 For a detailed study of the donors’ motives see Gellner (1996: 228–233).

7 The material here and below is quoted from Gellner (1992: 233–35).

8 The last six restorations were not only added in gold letters on the last pages of the manuscript, but were beforehand additionally documented in an excercise book by the scribe charged with writing the colophon.

9 I witnessed a discussion among those participating in the restoration effort whether the adequate term for this activity should be *jīrṇoddhāra*, literally “the lifting of old age” (Skt. *jīrṇa*, “old” and *dhāra* from *ud-dhṛ*, “to raise, remove”) or *pūrṇanirmāna*, literally “the complete [re]production.” The consensus among the young artisans was that the former was the adequate term. Alternatively, they used the new expression, *saphū lonegu*, literally “book care.”

10 My observations and conversations took place from 13 July to 5 August 2004 in Kvābāhāḥ where I spent the mornings attending the ongoing restoration work. The second restoration I witnessed and documented took place from May 14 to June 13, 2007 with the reconsecration taking on June 14. I was told by Binay that there is no fixed period for the restoration as it depends on the specific scale of the sponsorship and the need for upgrading, the deadline being always the end of the intercalary month.

11 Cp. the comprehensive study on the restorations of the Svayambhūcaitya in Kathmandu by Alexander von Rospatt (2000).

12 It was further attended by Toyebahadur Shakya, his son Jaya Bahadur Shakya, Jiribhai Shakya, Ashtaman Shakya, Buddharatna Shakya, Sano Buddharatna Shakya, Dharmaratna Shakya, Ashokaratna Shakya, Prakash Shakya, Raj Shakya, and Rajan Shakya.

13 For an overview of this script, see Anonymous (N.S. 1115).

14 The others were, in decreasing seniority, the goldsmiths Ashtaman Shakya, Dinesh Barjacaryra, Suresh Bajracharya, the painter Hemaratna Bajracarya, Sudhan‘s younger brother Prajnaratna, Dinesh Shakya, an ambitious young man working as renovator, and the juniormost Rubin Shakya, a student.

15 *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā. With Haribadhra’s Commentary Called Āloka*. [in the following referred to as Aṣṭa (V)] P.L. Vaidya (Hrsg.). Buddhist Sanskrit Texts 4. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute 1960. Vaidya bases his edition on the two previous editions *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*. R. Mitra (ed.). Bibliotheca Indica. Calcutta 1888 und den beiden Editionen des Kommentars *Abhisamayālaṃkāralokā.* U. Wogihara (ed.) Tokyo: Toyo Bunko 1932 und *Abhisamayālaṃkāra prajñāpāramitāvyākhyā (Haribhadra).* U. Wogihara (ed.). Tokyo: Toyo Bunko 1932. Mitra‘s editio princeps, which ignores the commentary, is based on a 11th cent. ms.

16 In 2007 I was told by Sudhan that this time 35% of the texts folios had required interventions compared to about 20% the previous time. He explained this by stating that they had taken more pain this time and had made repairs to the material and corrections to the text which had been previously omitted.

17 In several households in Lalitpur, I came across a relatively recent, hardbound edition of the ASP edited by Divyavajra Vajrācārya (2003) including the Āloka and a commentary in Newār published by the Lotos Research Center with the support of a Chinese sponsor. As far as I can tell this book is bought and owned for reasons which are more connected with the charisma of this albeit modern edition than for edifying reading. One should relativize the distinction between charismatic and noncharismatic manuscripts and allow even for the academic text being attributed its own "academic" charisma.

18 "This was probably much more the case for the earliest oral tradition period of the book cult where a definite material object around which the activity of the cult could be centered was absent." (Schopen 1975: 170).

Part IV

Art and architecture

10 Flowers for the *Dhamma*

Painted Buddhist palm leaf manuscript covers *(kamba)* of Sri Lanka

Bilinda Devage Nandadeva

Introduction

The majority of the wooden covers or *kamba* (singular: *kambaya*) used to enclose Buddhist palm leaf manuscripts have been painted with "floral subjects."[1] However, previous studies have not explored important issues such as the meaning of these floral subjects, their cultural and ritual uses, the relation between the painting and the intended purpose of the manuscript to preserve and transmit the Dhamma (Skt. Dharma), or *dhammakāya* (the body of doctrine) contained in the manuscript. Moreover, current art historical interpretation has reduced the purpose of the *kamba* paintings to mere ornamentation.

This essay explores the cultural purpose of "floral subjects" that are painted or carved on the covers of Sri Lankan palm leaf manuscripts containing Buddhist scriptures. It postulates that these floral subjects were not painted or carved merely as decorations or ornamentations to beautify the manuscript. I argue instead that they represent real flowers or garlands of flowers offered in honor of the Dhamma as embodied in the manuscripts. I examine this hypothesis in the light of Sinhalese Buddhist ritual practices and the visual liturgy of Buddhist art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a secondary objective, I also discuss issues such as the cultural or ritual significance of the *kamba* paintings in relation to the intended purposes of the manuscripts. Excluded from consideration are *kamba* paintings on nonreligious manuscripts as well as other forms of *kamba* paintings or carvings of nonfloral subjects, even though they may appear in Buddhist manuscripts.

Background

While we cannot determine unambiguously when palm leaves began to be used as writing material, scholars commonly date this practice to the early-historical period. It is believed that copying of Buddhist texts in the first century BCE (Geiger 1912: 237), the earliest recorded event of manuscript writing in Sri Lanka, was done on palm leaves. While it is plausible to assume that *kamba* paintings also appeared around the same time, such a proposition cannot be substantiated in the absence of hard evidence.[2] The oldest extant specimens of

Sri Lankan Buddhist manuscripts with *kamba* paintings belong to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[3]

The Buddhist revival in Kandy during the mid-eighteenth century led to the production of Buddhist manuscripts in large numbers, partly to meet the educational needs of the exponentially expanding order of monks and partly to satisfy the desires of certain laypersons who were eager to earn merit by sponsoring the production of religious texts for monastic use. The subsequent Buddhist revival that took place several decades later in the southern and western maritime regions also caused an enormous surge in Buddhist manuscript production for the very same reasons. The vast majority of manuscripts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries preserved in temple repositories, museums, and archival collections in Sri Lanka and abroad, do contain *kamba* with paintings or carvings of floral subjects, and it is this type of *kamba* art that is the subject of this essay.

The place of floral subjects in *kamba* paintings

The range of subjects selected for *kamba* paintings is very narrow when compared to the wide variety of subjects found in temple wall paintings. Among this limited number of subjects, the most common ones are floral subjects. Other themes include the twenty-four previous Buddhas *(Sūvisi Budun)*, the sixteen sacred sites of pilgrimage (*solosmahāsthānaya*), stories of Buddha's previous lives (*Jātaka* stories—*Vessantara Jātakaya* and *Sasa Jātakaya* being the most popular ones), and selected events of Buddha's life.

The frequency of different subjects selected to illustrate manuscript covers has yet to be surveyed systematically.[4] However, a cursory glance shows that the vast majority of *kamba* paintings contain idealized floral subjects. The idealized floral subjects consist of motifs derived from natural or mythical flowers or parts of flowers such as the petals of lotus arranged in a recurring pattern known as *palā-peti*, or alternatively recurring flowers and leaves on either side of a creeper known as *liya-väla* (Figure 10.1). The floral subjects found in *kamba* paintings are also depicted abundantly in temple wall paintings of the late-medieval period. The very high incidence of floral subjects in *kamba* paintings in eighteenth–nineteenth-century Buddhist manuscripts motivates the focus of this essay.

Four different approaches are entailed in this study. First, I describe the significance of flowers as votive objects offered to Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha during merit making rituals practiced since early historical times to the present. Next, I describe the place of Dhamma in Sri Lankan culture, the role of manuscripts as representations of the *dhammakāya* (the body of the doctrine), and the cultural importance of paying homage to such objects in order to gain merit. Thirdly, the discussion turns to the function of floral subjects in temple wall paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I argue that they were painted to represent actual flowers and garlands offered to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha for merit making purposes. On the basis of this evidence, I interpret the function of the floral subjects painted on *kamba* as analogous to the ritual use of actual garlands offered to the *dhammakāya* embodied by the manuscript.

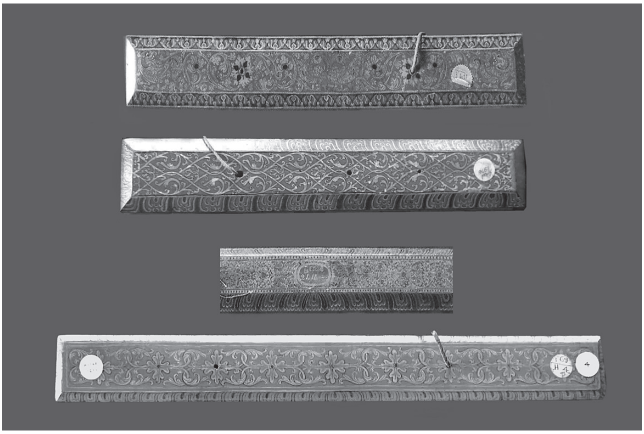


Figure 10.1 Manuscript cover paintings showing *liya väla* surrounded by *palāpeti* as representing garlands placed on lotus or other altars. From top to bottom: (a). Maha Sudarshna Sutta Sanna (Cat. No. 22 A 3.P). (b). Saravaliya (Cat. No. 69 J 6); (c). Mahavagga (Cat. No. missing); (d). Abidhamma Pitaka Atuvava (Cat. No. 69 H 04). All specimens from the collection of the Colombo National Museum. Courtesy of the Director, Colombo National Museum.

Flowers as votive objects in Sinhalese Buddhist rituals

Flowers have played an important role in Sinhalese Buddhist rituals since early historical times to the present day. The chronicles praise the rulers of ancient Sri Lanka for performing large scale, public flower-offering rituals and for establishing parks for the cultivation of blooming plants to meet the demand for flowers used in rituals. According to the *Mahāvaṃsa*, the Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka, King Bhātikābhaya (20 BCE to 08 CE) venerated the Buddha on three occasions by covering the entire *Mahāthūpa* at Anurādhapura, which reaches about 270 feet in height, with flowers and garlands (Geiger 1912: 241).[5] An ancient literary treatise on Sri Lankan history named *Rājaratnākaraya* mentions a regulation set out by King Vijayabāhu III (1246–50 CE) in connection with a new temple he built to house the sacred Tooth Relic. It states that the king decreed that 100,000 flowers be offered each day to this sacred object. The same treatise recounts that another king in the fifteenth century offered “no less than 6,480,320 sweet smelling flowers” to the Shrine of the Tooth Relic.

Writing in the nineteenth century on Sinhala Buddhist ceremonial practices, Tennent observed:

> Flowers and garlands are introduced in its religious rites to the utmost excess. The atmosphere of the wiharas and temples is rendered oppressive with the perfume of champac and jassamine, and the shrine of the deity, the pedestals

> of his image, and the steps leading to the temple are strewn thickly with blossoms of the nagaha and the lotus.
>
> (Tennent 1859: 367)

Robert Knox, the Englishman who had been imprisoned by the king of Kandy for more than nineteen years (1660–1679), referred to a class of "officers" whose duty was to supply the king with jasmine flowers each morning, wrapped in a white cloth and hung from a staff. This example illustrates the importance of ensuring an uninterrupted supply of flowers for Buddhist rituals in the seventeenth century (Knox 1981: 126). In return for this service to the royal household, these officers received land grants from the king and were expected to cultivate flowers on those lands. According to Knox (1981: 126), the officers were even permitted to confiscate land belonging to other people in order to cultivate flowering plants and to hold such land "until the ground becomes so worn, that the Flowers will thrive no longer, and then the Owners resume their own Lands again." It is perhaps the same class of "officers" that Coomaraswamy (1908: 22) identified as *mālā-kārayō*, a trade guild (*kulaya*) of florists and gardeners who were traditionally entrusted with the responsibility of providing flowers for Buddhist rituals.

The evidence mentioned above strongly indicates the importance of flowers or garlands as ritual offerings in Buddhist contexts. It is interesting to note that this tradition has continued to the twenty-first century, as Sri Lankans use flowers or garlands as the principal votive objects in Buddhist rituals even today. Most Sri Lankans grow at least a few blooming plants in their yards to supply the household's need for flowers used in daily or periodic offerings. Even today, offering 100,000 jasmine flowers to *Ruvanväliseya* at Anurādhapura, a ceremony initiated by a young monk a few years ago, has become a popular annual event with massive public participation, substantial donor sponsorship, extensive media coverage, and considerable political support.

Although Sri Lankan Buddhists often claim that Buddhist ritual is less important than the practice of the Dhamma, Buddhist rituals are, in fact, central to their religious activities. The most frequently performed ritual (*mal pūja kirīma*) consists of offering flowers or garlands to venerate the Buddha at a temple, a private shrine at home, a semiprivate shrine at the work place, or even at a small roadside shrine on the way to work. Compared to ritual practices in many Southeast and East Asian countries, offering flowers in Sri Lanka is a relatively simple form of ritual that many Buddhists perform daily.

Structure of the flower-offering ritual

The ritual of offering flowers consists of two parts, namely earning merit through the performance of devotional acts and transferring to others part of the merit earned. It follows a structure that is practiced quite uniformly throughout the island. The ritual begins with the devotee placing flowers or garlands, accompanied by lamps and incense, on the altar of the *stūpa* that is believed to contain Buddha's relics; on the *bōdhi* tree, which itself is a relic of the Buddha; and

to the image of the Buddha, which represents symbolically the historic Buddha. Then the devotee pays homage to Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, by reciting several devotional verses in front of the Buddha's image and performs the following acts:

- Saluting the Buddha
- Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha)
- Observing the Five Precepts
- Remembering the great qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Sangha
- Paying homage to the relics of the Buddha (*stūpa* and *bōdhi* tree)
- Making offerings to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha

These basic acts complete the merit making during the ritual, although some devotees recite additional verses to honor the twenty-four previous Buddhas and the sixteen sacred pilgrimage sites, and meditate briefly. The ritual ends by transferring part of the merit earned to divine beings, deceased family members, spirits, and selected others.

The ritual of offering flowers

As mentioned above, the offering of flowers placed on the altar at the start of the ritual is accompanied by the recitation of devotional verses. The two verses that devotees recite for this purpose are: "*Pūjēmi Buddhaṃ kusumena nena …*" and "*Vaṇṇa-gandha-guṇopetaṃ …*", which can be translated as follows:

> With these flowers, I revere the Buddha. By this merit, may I attain liberation. Just as this flower (or flowers) fades away, so will this body (of mine) be decayed.
>
> With this bunch of flowers, colorful and fragrant, I revere the resplendent, lotus-like feet of the Lord of Sages.[6]

The first verse is repeated two more times, replacing the Pāli word "*buddhaṃ*" with "*dhammaṃ*" and "*sanghaṃ.*" Although the ritual appears to be directed toward the Buddha, the verse clearly shows that the offering of flowers is not confined to the Buddha, as the Dhamma and Sangha are also honored with the ritual offering of flowers.

The offering of flowers to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, according to the first verse, serves two purposes. The first and perhaps most important objective for many lay Buddhists is to gain merit in order to attain liberation (*nirvāna*), the ultimate goal of a Buddhist. The other purpose is to remind oneself of the idea of impermanence, a central concept in the teachings of the Buddha. The second verse expresses two attributes of flowers, *i.e.*, their color and fragrance. It shows that in Sinhalese Buddhist culture, offering beautiful, fragrant flowers is believed to be an important act of merit.

Although the second purpose of the first verse can be considered as more important for an individual to set the self on the path to enlightenment (*nirvāna*), Sinhalese Buddhists pay more attention to the first purpose of the offering; *i.e.* earning merit. They emphasize making merit by engaging in rituals and similar activities that are considered as "good practices" (*yahapat väda)* or meritorious acts (*kusal kriyā* or *kusala karma*). Upon earning merit by offering flowers or similar votive objects to the Buddha, many Sinhalese make the wish to attain *nirvāna* in a future life "after enjoying all the comforts in the human world and the divine world (*dev minis säpa kelavara amā maha nivan säpa läbēvā).*"

The above discussion helps us clarify two interesting and relevant points. The first point is that venerating Dhamma by offering flowers is an integral part of Sri Lankan Buddhist liturgy. The second is that the result of offering flowers to Dhamma is to earn merit, which, according to Sinhalese Buddhists, is an essential prerequisite to attain *nirvāna,* the ultimate or supreme goal of a Buddhist.

The place of Dhamma in Sinhala Buddhism

During the ritual, the Buddha occupies the topmost position in the Triple Gem and all activities are directed toward the Buddha who discovered and preached the Dhamma. Southwold (1983), who investigated Buddhism as practiced in Sinhalese village communities, claims that lay people stress the importance of the Dhamma, the doctrine, in their religious practice, above the Buddha.

> It is not difficult to see that in the structure of this triune sacred, it is the Dhamma (Dharma) which is central and most salient. Village Buddhists regularly say that the Buddha does not exist, and that they venerate him as the discoverer and teacher of the Dhamma. Similarly, as Gombrich says, the Sangha too is respected, by most clergy and laymen, principally as preserver and teacher of the Dhamma. It therefore appears that Buddhists themselves define Buddhism primarily as a matter of doctrine, formulated belief.
>
> (Southwold 1983: 171)

Southwold's observation helps us understand the place of Dhamma in Sinhala Buddhist ritual and this fact, I suggest, is very relevant to role of Buddhist manuscripts in this context. In the eyes of a devotee, the body of the Buddha, *buddhakāya,* does not exist, as Southwold suggests, despite the fact that rituals are mostly directed toward the Buddha and ritual offerings are presented to him first. On the contrary, the body of the teachings, *dhammakāya,* does exist in the form of a manuscript that has been copied by a learned monk. It is the *dhammakāya* embodied in the manuscript that guides devotees to find the way to *nirvāna*. Therefore, the manuscript, as an embodiment of the Dhamma, is venerated in the same manner with ritual offerings.

The ritual significance of manuscripts

In Sinhalese culture, religious manuscripts are treated not as inanimate objects devoid of life, but as live, animate objects. They are designated with respect, adding the Sinhala suffix … *vahansē*. The same suffix is used when talking about the Buddha, *Budun vahansē*, or a monk, *sanghayā vahansē*. Accordingly, a manuscript about *pirit* is called *pirit pot vahansē* or *piruvana pot vahansē* to show respect in the same manner. At the beginning of a *pirit* chanting ritual, a male layperson carries on his head the *pirit pot vahansē*. Together with the reliquary casket, it is carried under a canopy or umbrella and followed by monks in this procession to the *pirit* chanting pavilion (*pirit maṇḍapaya*). This example demonstrates that religious manuscripts are treated with great respect. As the manuscripts contain the Dhamma, they are treated with the same degree of respect and veneration as the Buddha and monks. Just as the *pirit* manuscript is called *pirit pot vahansē*, other manuscripts may be called *jātaka pot* or *baṇa pot vahansē*.

When Sri Lanka's oldest extant monastic educational institute, Parama Dhamma Cetiya Pirivena, was established at Ratmalana, a suburb of Colombo, in the early eighteen hundreds, it did not have a Buddha image in its shrine room to which daily worship ritual could be directed. Reportedly, monks performed their daily devotions to the Dhamma manuscripts instead in order to pay homage to the Buddha.[7] This fact indicates the high regard for religious manuscripts in the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition.

The role of flowers in late-medieval period Buddhist temple paintings

Buddhist temple paintings of the late-medieval period contain a variety of flowers represented in idealized forms and play an important role in the iconography of wall paintings.[8] In order to understand their iconographic function within the pictorial space, we must consider the primary purpose of the paintings. The following passage from Holt (1996) aptly captures the function of the wall paintings.

> [T]he paintings that covered the walls and ceilings inside Sinhala Buddhist image houses in the late medieval Kandyan period constitute a visual liturgy: consciously created and coordinated sets of religious themes, paradigms, and images didactically intended to be internalized and cultivated by *religieux* for the purpose of making progress on the path to the ultimate realization of Buddhism's summum bonum – *nibbana*.
>
> (Holt 1996: 42).

We can therefore deduce that the flowers in the paintings also function as a part of the entire visual liturgy performed by the "consciously created" paintings.

Another approach to understanding the role of flowers in wall paintings is to consider the symbolic nature of the paintings as a whole. The following observation of Gunasinghe (1978) speaks to this important characteristic of late-medieval period temple paintings:

> What is most appealing in Kandyan painting is the symbolic content and not the manner of presentation … Like all other art traditions which are socially significant in that they are an integral part of the mental and spiritual make-up of a society at any given time, Kandyan painting is symbolic of popular aspirations and provides images of conviction in regard to acceptable social and spiritual values.
>
> (Gunasinghe 1978: 03)

Accordingly, the flowers in these paintings symbolize the very same flowers offered as objects of veneration in a ritual. Flowers became the subjects for paintings because of the important position they held as votive objects or offerings during rituals. Painted flowers convey the same idea of veneration and bring merit to the devotee who symbolically communicates with such painted flowers. Art historians have hitherto failed to recognize the pictorial meaning and liturgical function of these floral representations and their religio-aesthetic context.

From early nineteenth-century to the present, historians of Sri Lankan art have reduced the function of flowers in temple wall paintings to "space fillers" and "decorations." Referring to the representations of the lotus, which is a common flower in temple paintings of the late medieval period, Coomaraswamy (1908: 95) stated that "[T]he most characteristic simple lotus forms in use are the 'rosettes' used to fill space." Almost all subsequent writers on late medieval temple paintings have repeated Coomaraswamy's dictum without taking into account the visual liturgy created in the ritualistic space that is demarcated by the painted walls.

Manjusri, who conducted extensive research for many years on Buddhist temple paintings and is an authority on traditional decorative motifs, states:

> On the wall are paintings depicting the Seven Weeks following the Buddha's Enlightenment, the *sūvisi-vivāraṇa* or the "Twenty-four Declarations" of the previous Buddhas, as well as Arahat figures and decorative motifs….The walls on either side of the corridor are divided into series of horizontal panels or registers which contain narrative paintings and as well as decorative and other motifs. The subjects commonly depicted are *sūvisi-vivāraṇa*, the Buddha *carita* or life of the Buddha, and *Jātakas*. The ceilings are elaborately painted with decorative motifs as well as with celestial devices such as planets and constellations.
>
> (Manjusri 1977: 19)

More recently, Bandaranayake (1986: 120) described the flowers on the walls of the Degaldoruva temple, immediately above the statue, as "a painted awning

of large, decorative lotuses." Referring to floral subjects at Dambulla, he says, "[P]olychrome tracery and other ornamental detailing [were] applied to awnings [and] decorative creeper motifs" (Bandaranayake 1986: 160). On university campuses and in high schools in Sri Lanka, the idea is taught that flowers are "space fillers" or "decorations" that are characteristic of late medieval period paintings. This perpetuates unquestioningly a century-old idea that needs re-examination.[9]

I suggest that the flowers in paintings on temple walls and *kamba* function as a visual liturgy and that the flowers in painted narratives on temple walls have the same ritual and visual function as actual flowers offered in ritual veneration of the Triple Gem. The notion that the flowers were drawn to cover empty space in a composition might have originated due to the particular placement of such flowers within the pictorial space. I suggest, however, that the artists consciously and intentionally chose upper-level areas of the picture to paint floral subjects in order to emphasize the importance of flowers as votive offerings in honor of the religious personages presented below, or to enhance the pictorial content of the religious message of the narrative depicted.

The choice of the lotus flower for ceiling paintings in many of the temples supports this proposition. The lotus is considered to be one of the most powerful visual symbols of Sinhalese Buddhist art. It symbolizes purity, wisdom, enlightenment, and ultimate bliss. Thus, the painter filled the ceiling, the physical upward-boundary of the microcosm created within the sacred space of the image house, with the flower that symbolizes the ultimate bliss to pay homage to the Buddha.

By asserting a ritual function to painted flowers as described above, I do not necessarily deny their decorative significance. There is no question that the painters were aware of the decorative effects of flowers and I recognize that flowers served both liturgical and decorative purpose at once. However, I dismiss the popular idea that flowers were placed as a convention within the picture frame merely as "fillers to cover up empty spaces." Artists choose "appropriate spaces or locations" to place the objects they selected. Whether such spaces happen to be empty or not is a conscious, compositional preference of the artist and not a predetermined rule or convention.

Palā-peti and *Liya-väla* as garlands of flowers on lotus altars

As stated in the preceding section, in early historical times, certain kings used garlands to cover a *stūpa* in honoring the Buddha. Even in contemporary Sinhalese society, garlands are offered to Buddha as a gesture of veneration. Garlands of jasmine are attached to *pirit maṇḍapaya*, reliquary caskets, branches of *bō* trees, and even to a *stūpa*. Despite the ritual prominence of garlands, historians of Sri Lankan art have so far not recognized the pictorial representations of garlands, or their role in Buddhist temple paintings and other forms of religious art of Sri Lanka.



Figure 10.2 Brahmajala Sutta Vistara Sanna, University of Kelaniya Library (Cat. No. 232). Courtesy of the Librarian.

While art historians have identified *palā-peti* and *liya-väla* as decorative designs used for ornamentation and to fill empty space, I suggest instead that they represent garlands that are offered to honor the Buddha and other religious personages depicted on temple walls. In these instances, *palā-peti* represents garlands of lotus, the most sacred flower in Buddhist rituals, and the *liya-väla* represents all other types of flower garlands made in combination with foliage (Figure 10.2). In contrast to wall paintings that offer ample opportunities for artists to integrate garlands in the narrative, the *kamba* provided the painters with more limited opportunities for innovation and expression. However, *kamba* paintings show that painters depicted garlands by combining both form and function within a limited pictorial space in imaginative and innovative ways.

As a pictorial space, the outer surface of the *kamba* offers only two areas for painting: a long, flat, and rectangular plane surface and a narrow and slanted border around it. The most common scheme in *kamba* painting places the *liya-väla* in the flat center, surrounded by a *palā-peti* along the narrow border. This arrangement resembles closely the way in which flowers are displayed in Buddhist rituals with carved *palā-peti* borders surrounding the flowers and garlands.

This resemblance suggests that the paintings of floral subjects on *kamba* of Buddhist manuscripts that represent *liya-väla* and *palā-peti* can be interpreted as representations of garlands placed on a similar altar on which to place offerings of lotus flowers, in this instance, to pay homage to the Dhamma. Furthermore, I suggest that the intent of offering garlands to the Dhamma in pictorial form is to earn merit in the same way that Sinhalese Buddhists make merit by offering flowers on temple altars.

It follows from this interpretation that the *kambaya*, with its characteristic shape of a 'truncated pyramid' with a flat top and surrounded by a narrow slanted border, functions symbolically as an altar to receive garlands. The use of *pala-peti*, which derives from the most sacred flower for Buddhists—the lotus—as a border motif suggests that the *kambaya* symbolizes an altar. It follows from this that the *kamba* paintings in which garlands are placed on a lotus altar were intended as a visual liturgy to pay homage to the Dhamma or the *dhammakāya* embodied by the manuscript. As the painted flowers and garlands will not fade, the merit gained through the ritual offering endures into the future. This process can be understood as a perpetual visual liturgy that continues to make merit for the painter and the sponsor of the manuscript cover.

Venerating the *dhammakāya*

On the basis of identifying this visual liturgy, I suggest that the floral subjects painted on *kamba* represent flowers and garlands offered to the *dhammakāya*, which is embodied by the manuscript. The flowers and garlands in pictorial form serve the same religious purpose as flowers and garlands offered to the Triple Gem as votive objects during rituals. By symbolizing a pictorial offering of flowers to the Dhamma, the devotee earns merit as he or she would with flowers offered in a ritual. This interpretation is especially plausible in light of the fact that the veneration of books, irrespective of their content, continues to be an important part of Sri Lankan culture even today.[10]

My interpretation does not negate the decorative dimension of flowers in wall paintings and of floral paintings on manuscript covers. Clearly, painters consciously chose the decorative effects of painting garlands and they were also aware of the need for ornamenting the covers. Therefore, I argue for a dual or embedded purpose for their presence in Sri Lankan Buddhist art, namely the primacy of veneration and a secondary need for decoration. These two forms are complementary, rather than contradictory. Ornamentation or beautification of religious objects is itself an act of merit, according to Buddhist practices. Moreover, in this particular case, the manuscript is not an ordinary object, but an embodiment of the *dhammakāya.*

Manuscript, art, and the notion of merit

The above interpretation suggests further questions. Was the intention only to make merit or were the garlands offered in order to meet a liturgical objective? The normative practice in Sri Lankan Buddhism requires that the *dhammakāya* be offered flowers as sacred objects, just as the relics or images of the Buddha require that they be always adorned with votive objects, like flowers.

However, the purpose of manuscripts was not symbolic, but practical, and facilitated the transmission of knowledge of the doctrine. Monks needed manuscripts in order to study the teachings in the same way that books are used today. They were taken out from the repositories for reading and copying and, in the process, leaves were reshuffled and reassembled for examination purposes and so on. Therefore, the manuscript was also a pedagogical object in the life of a learning monk.

I mentioned above that the veneration of books, irrespective of their content, is very much a part of Sri Lankan culture today. I have suggested that Buddhist manuscripts served a dual purpose. They simultaneously functioned as pedagogical and as sacred objects. Even though the painting of garlands has no direct bearing on the pedagogy or the transmission of the doctrine, the motifs were needed in order to perform the liturgy through which both the painter and the sponsor earned merit. As pictorial offerings, these floral subjects also evoke an appropriate response of reverence from those viewing or using the manuscripts.

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Notes

1 For this paper, I use the term "floral subjects" as a broad term to replace the popularly used terms "flowers," "floral decorations," "floral designs," "floral motifs," or "floral ornamentations" to mean the representations that are traditionally known as *mal*, *mal-väda, mal-kam, mal-mōstara*, *palā peti, liya väla*, and *liya pata*. My preference for this is because the popular terms reduce the form of such flowers to "abstraction of floral elements," and their function to mere "ornamentation." This limits any further interpretation of the subject as attempted in this paper. For popular interpretations of the flowers, see Coomaraswamy (1908: 96–101).

2 It is somewhat curious that the well-known but highly debated stone statue of the Polonnaruva period (1065–1303), alleged to represent a king or a sage holding an object similar to a palm-leaf manuscript does not suggest that it has a cover, as it follows a curvilinear shape, and would otherwise have followed a straight line if a *kambaya* had been attached. In another example, a mid-twentieth-century wall painting by Solius Mendis at Kelaniya Temple depicting the fifth century CE historic event of the monk Buddhagosha presenting to the Sangharaja of Mahaviharaya the *Visuddhimagga* written on palm-leaf by him, there is no suggestion of covers being attached to the manuscripts. However, despite such random visual records, there is documented evidence from later periods such as the one in *Girā Sandēshaya*, an anonymous book of poetry written in the fifteenth century in which it mentions the monks at Pepiliyana Vihāra opening the painted covers of the sacred books to investigate the doctrine (v. 205).

3 Among the oldest extant Buddhist manuscripts in Sri Lanka, there is the *Cullavaggapāli* in the collection of the Colombo National Museum dated to the thirteenth century, and two copies of *Sāratthadīpani*, one in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris and the other

other in the British Library in London, both dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century (Fernando 1982: 146–57; Bandaranayake 1986: 15–16, 283).

4 One can expect, however, that the dissertation research of Sherry Harlacher at Arizona State University (ASU) on painted manuscript covers from Sri Lanka will serve to remedy this situation.

5 The relevant portion of the text reads: "And when the king [Bhātikābhaya] had commanded that the Great Cetiya, from the *vedikā* at the foot to the parasol at the top, be plastered with (a paste of) sweet-smelling unguent four fingers thick and that flowers be carefully embedded therein by their stalks, he made the thūpa even as a globe of flowers. Another time he commanded them to plaster the cetiya with (a paste of) minimum eight fingers thick, and thus he changed it into a heap of flowers. Yet another time he commanded that the cetiya be strewn with flowers from the steps to the parasol on the top, and thus, he covered it over with a mass of blossoms" (Geiger 1912: 241).

6 The two Pāli devotional verses (*gāthā*s) recited when offering flowers are as follows: *Vaṇṇa-gandha-guṇopetaṃ, Etaṃ kusuma-santatiṃ,/ Pūjayāmi munindassa, Sirīpāda-saroruhe. Pūjemi buddhaṃ kusumena nena, Puññena metena labhāmi mokkhaṃ,/ Pupphaṃ milāyāti yathā idam me, Kāyā tathāyāti vināsabhāvaṃ.*

7 This information was provided by Ven. Tapovanaye Sutadhara of the Ventura Buddhist Study Center in Ventura, California, 2006 (personal communication).

8 Coomaraswamy (1908) and Manjusri (1977) have fully investigated the kinds of flowers and floral motifs used in late-medieval Sri Lankan art. According to them, lotus, jasmine, champac or *sapu*, *vätakeiya*, *kadupul* (a flower belong to the imaginary world of the *nāga*), *parasatu* (a flower belong to the imaginary world of divine beings), *katuru-mala* (an imaginary flower), and *sīna-mala*, *nārilatā-mala*, and *annāsi-mala* were the most popular flowers in temple paintings. When flowers or floral subjects were represented in art, they were mostly presented not in their natural form, but in an idealized form (Coomaraswamy 1908: 103). Of the flowers mentioned above, lotus and jasmine occupy a very special place in Sinhala art, being represented in an infinite number of variations and with great charm (Coomaraswamy 1908: 94, 95).

9 It should be mentioned that Paranavitana (1971) has explained the symbolic meanings associated with the *palā-peti* and *liya-väla* in his elaborate interpretation of the carvings on moonstones (*sandakadapahana*).

10 Paying respect to books, irrespective of their contents, is an important aspect of contemporary Sinhala culture. Children are taught to bow before books in the same gesture of worshipping (*vaňdala namaskāra karanava*) before and after reading them. If a book is dropped accidentally, it is considered as disrespectful to the "knowledge" it contains; so the child is expected to do the same *vaňda namaskāra*, up to three-times before picking it up. Therefore, there is no surprise that in the past, people considered that religious palm-leaf manuscripts deserved veneration.

11 From text to image

Copying as Buddhist practice in late fourteenth century Sukhothai

M.L. Pattaratorn Chirapravati

Sukhothai was one of the earliest ethnic Thai kingdoms in what is now present-day Thailand. It flourished from the end of the thirteenth to the late fourteenth century. Buddhism and Hinduism existed side by side; remains of Buddhist temples and Hindu shrines, sculptures, and inscriptions are among the extant evidence of the religious practices of this kingdom. The diversity of religious practices seems to have been encouraged and patronized by the kings and the royal families whose names frequently appear on inscriptions that have been discovered in many temples in the vicinity of the ancient city.

Despite this patronage of both religions, at least publically, Buddhism emerged as the dominant tradition over time. However, the Buddhist art of Sukhothai derived from a wide range of sources. The first part of this article covers the history of the Sinhalese lineages that became the preferred ones of the Buddhism of Sukhothai. The second part covers the Sinhalese stylistic elements in Sukhothai temples of the late fourteenth century. This article demonstrates that Buddhist art in Sukhothai is not easily defined.

The presence of Sinhalese Buddhism appears from the earliest phase of Sukhothai and can be traced not only in inscriptions and chronicles, but also in art and architecture. Inscription number I of King Ram Khamhaeng (r. 1279–1298) dated to around 1292 provides important information about the Buddhist lineages and temples built during his reign in Sukhothai. According to Inscription I, King Ram Khamhaeng built an *aranyik* (forest dwelling monastery) temple for the *Sangharāja* (patriarch of Sukhothai) on the northwest side outside of the city for a renowned Mahathera from Nakhon Si Thammarat in southern Thailand. The temple is described in the inscription as having a "large, lofty, and extremely beautiful *vihāra*" (Wat Khao Saphan Hin). The history of a well-known Sihing Buddha begins with the myth that the image was created in Sri Lanka in the year 700 of the Buddhist era during the reign of King Rocaraja, who has been identified as Ram Khamhaeng of Sukhothai. The image went across the ocean to Nakhon Si Thammarat and then to Sukhothai and Lanna in the north. The bringing of the Sihing Buddha to Sukhothai suggests influence from the outside, especially from Sri Lanka. Inscription number I (of Sukhothai) also mentions that the *Nagaravasi* monks (City-Dwellers) presided in a *vihāra* (Thai: *wihan*) by the

Mahadhatu temple in the ancient city. They also had a *sanghara*. Unfortunately, most temples built by Ram Khamhaeng have undergone many major modifications over the years; therefore, it is not possible to trace the Sinhalese styles of the early thirteenth century.

During the wars in Sri Lanka in the middle of the fourteenth century, Siamese monks traveled to Martaban (Mattama) in Myanmar to study and reordain in the Sri Lankan monastic lineage. However, by the end of the fourteenth century to the early fifteenth century, it seems to have been even more common for Buddhist missions to travel back and forth between Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka (see map, Figure 11.1). Manuscript texts were exchanged in these journeys, as well as objects and knowledge of art. The latter is clearly evidenced by the exchange of Sinhalese, Sukhothai, and Southern Burmese stylistic elements that appear in the sculptures and architecture of these regions.



Figure 11.1 Important Buddhist sites in South and Southeast Asia. Drawn by Pierre Pichard. From P. Skilling, M.L.P. Chirapravati, P. Pichard, P. Assavavirulhakarn, and S. Pakdeekham, *Past Lives of the Buddha: Wat Si Chum—Art, Architecture and Inscriptions* (Bangkok: River Books, 2008). Courtesy of the River Books Co. Ltd.

Two Thai chronicles, *Mūlasāsana* and *Jinakālamālī*, contain accounts of a new community of *Sīhalabikkhu* that was established at Martaban by a Sinhalese monk named Anumati and twelve Mon monks in 1331, and of an offshoot from it established in Sukhothai around 1341 (Nagara and Griswold 1992: 320). Anumati, who was later granted the title *Mahasami* Udumbarapuppha, was the first monk in Martaban to have ties with the famous forest dwelling monastery of the Udumbaragiri (in Sri Lanka). *Mahasamī* Udumbarapuppha's fame attracted disciples from afar to Martaban. Two of these were Siamese *mahāthera*s, Sumana and Anomadassi, from Sukhothai. They were reordained and studied there for five years. (They returned again in 1341/1342 and received the level of *mahāthera*.) According to the Kalyāṇī Inscription, there were six sects at Martaban between 1245 and 1458. Five of them belonged to *Sīhalabikkhu*, meaning the monastic lineage of Sri Lanka, of which three were derived from the three Sri Lankan sects at Pagan right after it fell in 1287, and the other two were established later.[1]

King Löthai (c. 1298–1346/7) of Sukhothai sent a request to *Mahasamī* Udumbarapuppha to send a monk to Sukhothai who was qualified to perform the acts of the Sinhalese Sangha. This suggests that at the time, there were not yet any qualified *Sīhalabikkhu* at Sukhothai, and it also shows a preference for the Sinhalese lineage. According to the *Mūlasāsana*, a northern chronicle composed in the fifteenth century in the Tai Yuan language, when a Thai monk from Sukhothai, *Mahasamī* Sumana, together with a younger monk from Sri Lanka, arrived in Sukhothai, King Löthai welcomed them with joy and installed them in the Mango-Grove Monastery (Wat Pha Mamuang), which he had just built a kilometer west of the city.[2] Around 1340, another well-known Thai monk, Anomadassi, returned and went to Si Satchanalai and resided at the Red Forest Monastery (Wat Pha Daeng). The chronicle also mentions that both Sumana and Anomadassi practiced the religion, placed *sīmā* (boundary stones), and ordained people of Sukhothai into the monkhood.

Thai speakers were active in Martaban, which was part of the Mon kingdom from around the thirteenth century before the capital was moved to Pegu during the reign of King Wareru, an usurper who is said to have been a son-in-law of King Ram Khamhaeng of Sukhothai, in the closing decades of the thirteenth century.[3] A learned monk, Medhankara, was brought from Martaban to Sukhothai in 1361 and resided at Wat Pha Mamuang, another well-known dwelling for forest monks.[4] Medhankara had studied in Sri Lanka and was the author of the famous Pāli cosmological text *Lokappadīpakasāra* that was adapted and translated into Thai as *Trai Phum Phra Ruang* ("The Three Worlds According to Phra Ruang") during King Lithai's reign (r. 1347–1368/74). This literature became a vital source for Thai mural paintings in the central region.

The *Jinakālamālī*, a sixteenth-century chronicle from the northern Thai kingdom, contains another interesting record of Sinhalese monks. The chronicle was composed in Pāli by the Monk Ratanapañña, who belonged to the Sinhalese lineage *(Sīhalabikkhunikāya)* at the Red Forest Monastery near Chiang Mai in 1516/7. This monastery was a stronghold of the "New Sinhalese Sect." According to the *Jinakālamālīpakaraṇaṃ*, twenty-five monks from Chiang Mai

and eight from Cambodia returned to Ayutthaya in 1424 from Sri Lanka where they had been reordained. As a result, they were said to belong to the *Sīhalabikkhunikāya*. These monks brought back with them a relic of the Buddha and two learned Sinhalese monks. This group reordained Silavisuddhi, the advisor of King Borommaracha II's wife, and stayed in Ayutthaya for four years. Their presence may explain why new types of artifacts with a Sinhalese style and other artistic elements appeared among the deposits found in the Wat Ratchaburana crypt in Ayutthaya, which was built in 1424.[5]

Another important figure who helped transmit the Sinhalese lineage to Sukhothai during King Löthai's reign was *Mahāthera* Si Sattha (Mahāthera Śrīsaddharāja Culamani), a royal family member who at the age of 31 left his lay life and was ordained as a monk. According to Inscriptions II and XI of Sukhothai, in around 1344 Si Sattha went via Martaban to India and then to Sri Lanka where he spent ten years. Griswold and Prasert suggest that from Inscription II, even though Si Sattha did not directly address this issue, he was reordained in the Mahāvihāra succession. (He restored the Mahāthūpa and the Mahāvihāra that were falling into ruins). Upon leaving Sri Lanka, Si Sattha took a group of Sinhalese craftsmen with him, as well as two great precious relics: the *kesadhātu* (hair relic) and the *gīvādhātu* (neck bone relic). The relics were housed in the Mahādhātu at Sukhothai. These relics were said to have performed miracles, including springing out of the monument. The Sinhalese living at Sukhothai invited the relics to return to the *cetiya*, but they were unsuccessful. When the author of the inscription invited the relics to return, they came down, flew around, and leapt into the *cetiya*. He wrote, "I have boundless faith…I threw myself on the ground and offered my life as an irrevocable gift, vowing to uphold the religion of Lankādīpa, and to obey the Buddha's words in all things." Griswold analyzed this passage and determined that the author vowed to take a pilgrimage to Sri Lanka (Griswold 1967: 20). The Sinhalese mentioned in this passage were probably the group Si Sattha brought along to Sukhothai and later they appear twice in Inscription II (Nagara and Griswold 1992: 352).

Inscription II also states that Si Sattha presided over the enshrinement of the *dantadhatu* (Tooth Relic) at a forest monastery outside the city. The important temples where the *Sīhalabhikku* presided were quite distant from the center of the city, as dictated by the rule requiring a certain distance from the nearest town or village. Si Sattha is also believed to be an author of Side II of Inscription XI. Prasert and Griswold attribute Side I of this inscription to Lithai's reign and suggest a date between around 1357 and 1361 (Nagara and Griswold 1992: 430–1, 466–9). Prince Damrong discovered this inscription in 1921 lying beside a stone footprint of the Buddha, still *in situ* at Khao Kop (Frog Hill) in Nakhon Sawan province. According to Inscription III, dated to around 1357, Phraya Dhammikarat had copies made of the famous footprint on Mount Sumanakūṭa (Adam's Peak) in Sri Lanka.[6] These footprints were placed in four locations: Si Satchanalai, Sumanakut Hill in Sukhothai, Muang Bangpan (in Khamphangpet), and Pakprabang (in Nakhon Sawan) (Krabuansaeng 1989: 132–3).

Another interesting inscription is the Phnom Sai Dam' inscription discovered at Wat Chang Lom in Sukhothai. The inscription provides an interesting record

of his meritorious deeds dated to 1384 (Nagara and Griswold 1992: 228–33). After he was ordained in the lineage of Mahāthera Anuradh from Sri Lanka, he converted his home to a monastery, had a Buddha image made and provided necessities to monks. Among the offerings was a fan for chanting the Dhamma *(phat suat tham)*.[7]

From Sukhothai inscriptions I, II, III, and XI and the two Chronicles mentioned earlier, it is apparent that there were many groups of Sinhalese monks in Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, and Chiang Mai around the end of the thirteenth to the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Sinhalese lineages in Sukhothai can be traced either directly to the Mahāvihāra in Sri Lanka or to the *Sīhalabhikkunikāya* in Martaban. We can also sense the competition and hierarchy among the monks who presided in the region. If Sinhalese craftsmen were brought from Gampola to Sukhothai as claimed by Si Sattha in his inscription (Inscription II, also known as Wat Si Chum inscription), we should be able to trace Sinhalese stylistic or iconographic elements on some temples in Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai. The same can also be applied to temples in Ayutthaya and Chiang Mai. That different Buddhist lineages seem to have existed side by side implies that several iconographic canons might have been in use around this time (Listopad 1995: 474).

Copying as Meritorious act (*Ānisaṃsa*)

Trying to understand from archaeological remains what happened six hundred years ago can sometimes be very difficult. It is even more difficult when both the original site and the sites that it inspired have gone through numerous restorations. However, sometimes in spite of all the changes, we can still trace distinctive regional, historical, and iconographical elements. Most of the archaeological sites in Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai have experienced major restorations, but the distinctive stylistic appearance of the fourteenth century Gampola style, which represents the most significant Sinhalese "icon type," has been preserved on some images and architectural elements. Because the copying of images and texts and the making of specific Buddha images continue to be performed as part of merit-making practices in Thailand through the present day, it would not be surprising that this practice was popular in the fourteenth century or earlier. Copying is believed to transmit power and prestige; therefore, it is likely that many ancient restorations at prominent sites preserved the original forms and iconographic programs.

In Thailand, it has been common from early times, at all social levels, to donate Buddha images and votive tablets (*Phra Phim*) to temples as meritorious acts (*puñña*). While kings and royal family members commissioned and patronized large-scale constructions such as temples, *e.g., stūpa*s (Thai: *chedi*), *vihāra*s (Thai: *wihan*), and gigantic images; people with lesser budgets donated what they could afford, such as clay and metal tablets, roof tiles, and bricks. These offerings were believed to help the donors accrue good merit and to result in good births in future lives. Thus, important types of Buddha images, such as the Sihing Buddha, mentioned earlier, were copied and placed among the most revered images in

many regions.[8] Their origins were recorded in different chronicles (Thai: *tumnan*). Buddha images were also deposited inside and on the exterior of *chedi* as early as the seventh century. Dedicatory inscriptions were inscribed and painted on *sīmā* stones, freestanding stone inscriptions, the bases of Buddha images, on the back of votive tablets, and on Buddhist manuscripts.[9] In general, the names of donors and their families were sometimes inscribed on the offering objects. It is also common to find an inscription of the donors' wishes, especially the desire to be reborn in the time of Maitreya Buddha (Thai: Phra Si-an or Si Arya Mattaya) or in his paradise.

Donald K. Swearer points out that the thirteenth to fourteenth-century text compiled in Sri Lanka, *Kosalabimbavaṇṇanā* (The Laudatory Account of the Kosala Image), emphasizes "the meritorious reward or benefit from constructing a Buddha image, having one constructed, copying a text, or having one copied." This act was considered to be beneficial *(hita)* and meritorious *(ānisaṃsa; Thai, anisong)*. It also results in rebirth states and conditions (Swearer 2004: 19–20). This is why there was a preference for certain types of images (e.g., the sandalwood Buddha image made by King Prasenadi of Kosala and Phra Sihing) and Buddhist texts (e.g, Vessantara *Jātaka*) (Swearer 2004: 14–22). According to the *Kosalabimbavaṇṇanā*, the Buddha instructed, "whoever builds an image of [the Buddha] whatever size and materials accrues a great immeasurable, incalculable benefit" *(appmeyyam asamkheyyam mahanisamsan)* (Swearer 2004: 15). Hiram W. Woodward raises the following interesting question about "copying" the Sihing Buddha: "Is the existence of copies an indication that the privileged status of all Buddha images derived from the act of copying?" (Woodward 1997: 502–3). Prasert Na Nagara and A.B. Griswold explain that a copy of a revered object does not need to be exact, but needs to have some relationship with the original. They explain this concept as follows:

Thus a Southeast Asian monarch who wished to make a copy of the Footprint might send an emissary to Ceylon to measure its length, or the length of the outline of the footsole on its cover, and to take impressions of the *Dhammacakka* and each of the 108 auspicious signs. When the emissary returned, work on the copy could begin. The material used for it—stone, metal, wood, or clay—would be a matter of choice; so would the style of drawing or modeling, which in any case would depend on the experience and training of the craftsman who executed the copy; and a considerable degree of freedom in the composition was permissible…(Nagara and Griswold 1992: 758).

In my opinion, on the basis of archaeological remains in Burma and Thailand, acts of copying for *ānisaṃsa* can be classified into two categories: "actual copying" the likeness of a revered original object and "conceptual copying" of a revered object from an available example. Once the object was made and blessed in association with the revered original (e.g., Mount Sumanakūṭa), it would be considered sacred.

The best examples of the concept of "actual copying" are the representations of both the main Buddha image and the Mahābodhi temple in Bodh Gaya. Replicas of the Mahābodhi temple, the extremely important Buddhist *pāribhogika* site

of the Enlightenment, were constructed in Burma, Thailand, Nepal, and many other countries in Asia.[10] Susan L. Huntington remarks that Buddhists everywhere longed to experience the religious power of the original *pāribhogika* places, so Buddhist monarchs created replicas as a way to extend the sacred topography of Buddhism into their own homelands.[11] The focus on the site of the Enlightenment clearly shows that it was the holiest site under Pāla-Sena patronage in northeastern India. Thus, it is not surprising that the Mahābodhi temple's main Buddha image was also copied and portrayed on mural paintings, stucco, and votive tablets across Asia. An image of the Buddha seated with the hands performing *bhūmisparśamudra* and the legs crossed in either *vīrāsana* or *vajrāsana*, under a large tower structure with *bodhi* branches spraying out on the sides is a representation of the main image at the Mahābodhi temple. The so-called "*Andagu plaques*" recovered in India, Burma, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, exhibit a representation of the Mahābodhi image.[12]

Like Bodh Gaya and other sites related to the Buddha's life, Sri Lanka was actively involved in the development and practice of Buddhism. Two ancient chronicles, *Mahāvaṃsa* (ca. fifth or sixth century) and *Thūpavaṃsa* (ca. thirteenth century), provide vital historical information about the transmission of Buddhism from India to Sri Lanka as well as about the historical development of Buddhism within Sri Lanka (see Jayawickrama 1971). It is interesting that even though Sinhalese monks were very involved at important Buddhist sites in the Bihar region, especially the Mahābodhi temple, Sinhalese monks and artisans did not copy the so-called "international Pāla style"[13] as the main model of this scene like in other countries (e.g., Burma, Thailand, Nepal, Tibet, and China); rather they created their own stylistic preferences and iconographic elements.[14] Vidya Dehejia points out that the earth-touching gesture *(bhūmisparśamudra)*, which is associated in all India sculptures with the Enlightenment scene, was rarely depicted in Sri Lanka as the meditation hand gesture (*samādhi* or *dhyānamudra*) took its place.[15] The fact that the Sinhalese had a strong connection to the Mahābodhi temple but did not copy the popular stylistic appearances from this site may indicate how they viewed themselves in the Buddhist world. According to the *Mahāvaṃsa*, Buddhism was brought to Sri Lanka by Mahinda, the son of King Aśoka (c. 272–231 BCE) of Maurya, who converted the Sinhalese King Devānaṃpiyatissa (250–210 BCE) of Anurādhapura to Buddhism. Later, Samghamitta, Mahinda's sister, brought a cutting of the Bodhi Tree from Bodh Gaya to be planted, and Sumana, Aśoka's grandson, brought the Buddha's alms bowl and collarbone to be enshrined in the reliquary mound of the great Mahāvihāra monastery. Sinhalese chronicles also claim that the Buddha proclaimed that his doctrines would be safeguarded in Sri Lanka.[16] Hence, this early connection between Aśoka and the Sinhalese kings legitimized and authenticated Sinhalese Buddhism during the significant reformation of Buddhism in the second century BCE. Mainly because of the destruction of Buddhist centers in India by the Muslims in the late twelfth century, by the thirteenth century Buddhism had all but disappeared from the mainland. On the other hand, Buddhism continued to flourish in Sri Lanka

and the island became its extant center. Thus, it is not surprising to find many references in chronicles and inscriptions recording active connections and exchanges between Sinhalese Buddhist lineages in Southeast Asia during the late thirteenth century.

Sri Lanka, as the eminent center of Theravāda Buddhism in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, obviously had established stylistic and iconographic trademarks, which influenced new architectural forms, decorative elements, and symbols in Southeast Asia. The religious intercourse between Sri Lanka, Northern central Thailand (e.g., Lumphun, Sukhothai, and Si Satchanalai), and southern Burma (e.g., Martaban, Thaton, and Pegu) can be traced from archaeological remains of the twelfth century. It is notable that Sri Lanka and the north-central Thai had exchanges and inspired one another and the transmission of iconography and stylistic appearances was not in only one direction. Rather there were iconographic and stylistic exchanges between these two regions. An important example of such an exchange can be seen by comparing the distinctive square pyramidal tower structures of *Chedi* Kukut in Wat Chamathevi in the Mon kingdom of Haripunjaya (in present day Lumphun province), dated to around the eleventh or twelfth century, and the Satmahal Pāsāda at Polunnaruva (dated to the reign of Polonnaruva's King Nissankamalla, 1187–1196).[17] On the one hand, Hiram Woodward suggests that the source of the pyramidal structure of *Chedi* Kukut came from outside such as Polonnaruva and Nagapatinam on the south-eastern coast of India, while Von Schroeder, on the other hand, feels that the Sinhalese structure was inspired by *Chedi* Kukut. This is interesting, because the square pyramidal tower structure of the Sathamahal Pāsāda is unique for Sri Lanka, but was common in Burma and north-central Thailand. Even though this is still an open question among scholars, Woodward suggests that *Chedi* Kukut may have conceptually represented the Mahābodhi temple. He also suggests that there is some evidence of connections between the stylistic appearances of the subsidiary towers of *Chedi* Kukut and the Sathamahal Pāsāda to the Mahābodhi temple at Pagan.[18]

This is interesting because if the Satamahal Pāsāda and *Chedi* Kukut both represent the Mahābodhi temple, where was the original structure that the builders used as a model? Because the structure of these two sites is substantially different from the Mahābodhi temple in Bodh Gaya,[19] is it possible that they were built based on another well-known site that no longer exists such as in Southern Burma or Martaban? Did monks/craftsmen copy the structure from pictures depicted on manuscripts, votive tablets, or miniature replicas of the *stūpa* just like those of the Mahābodhi temple? Although we may not be able to answer these questions, the close similarities between *Chedi* Kukut and the Satmahal Pāsāda are undeniable.

Several references already mentioned imply that Martaban could be the site that links both Sinhalese lineages and artistic transmissions among north-central Thailand, southern Burma, and Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, there are almost no archaeological remains left in Martaban that can be used for this study. However, the historical connections recorded on several Sukhothai inscriptions and chronicles identify significant roles that Martaban had before the Thai took control over this region. H.L. Shorto refers to a structure that no longer exists: "The Myatheindan at

Martaban, built as the state cult centre at the fall of the Pagan Empire, has 28 niches in three tiers, now nearly all empty. The most likely guess is that they housed the 28 Buddhas…." (Shorto 1971: 79). It is interesting to note that this description indicates features similar to *Chedi* Kukut and to some Haripunjaya votive tablets dated to around the thirteenth century.

In another form of "copying," the object was not literally and actually copied but was conceptually and ideally copied from the most revered site of its type. In this case, the image or object was modeled after an accessible or available example. An example in Sukhothai of this practice can be found in Inscription III, dated to around 1357, as mentioned earlier, that Phraya Dhammikarat had copies made of the famous footprint *(buddhapāda)* at Sumanakūṭa (Adam's Peak) in Sri Lanka.[20] Then they were placed at four locations in Thailand. According to the *Mahāvaṃsa*, the Buddha stamped his footprint during his third visit to Sri Lanka. This site became one of the most sacred Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The footprint is held sacred, because it belongs to the category of *paribhogacetiya* (a *cetiya* by association with the Buddha). Prasert and Griswold explain that "…any *paribhogacetiya* is an *uddesikacetiya*, an 'indicative reminder,' deriving its efficacy from the model it is copied from" (1992: 758). Stylistically these four *buddhapāda*s obviously display the symbols in the Burmese configuration rather than that of the Sumanakūṭa (Prasert and Griswold 1992: 304). The footprints are arranged in a grid that resembles that of Pagan (e.g., the Schwezigon) and are decorated with 108 symbols (Prasert and Griswold 1992: 302). Although Buddha's footprints were produced much earlier in Southeast Asia, footprints with 108 auspicious signs did not appear until the end of the thirteenth century. Even though it has not yet been established where the first lists of the 108 marks were made or where the first depictions of footprints with the 108 marks were created, scholars seem to agree that the Sinhalese Pāli text *Jinālankāra-ṭīkā* stands as the earliest source of the 108 auspicious signs. The *Jinālankāra-ṭīkā* is believed to have been written by a Sinhalese monk in the twelfth century. Di Crococo and Woodward have very different readings and reasons for their dating of Sukhothai footprints. Woodward suggests that the concept of making stone footprints was introduced to Sukhothai from Martaban in the middle of the fourteenth century (Woodward 2005).

Thus, the word "copy" in Inscription III might have been used symbolically to refer to the portrayal of the revered form, in this case *buddhapāda*, of objects in Sri Lanka (Figure 11.2). This suggests that Sukhothai craftsmen used what was available to them as a model for the four footprints. In this case, the Burmese contemporary model probably was the source. Hence, the increasing popularity of the footprint in Sukhothai may represent a new iconographic design imported from Sri Lanka at the time.

This inference is also supported by the footprint that Si Sattha had placed in the passage-like tunnel at Wat Si Chum. Even though Wat Si Chum's footprint is the only known example of a footprint in Thailand that was installed in the ceiling instead of being placed on the ground or on a high base, in Pagan it was customary to paint pairs of footprints with the toes pointing toward the sanctuary on the ceiling

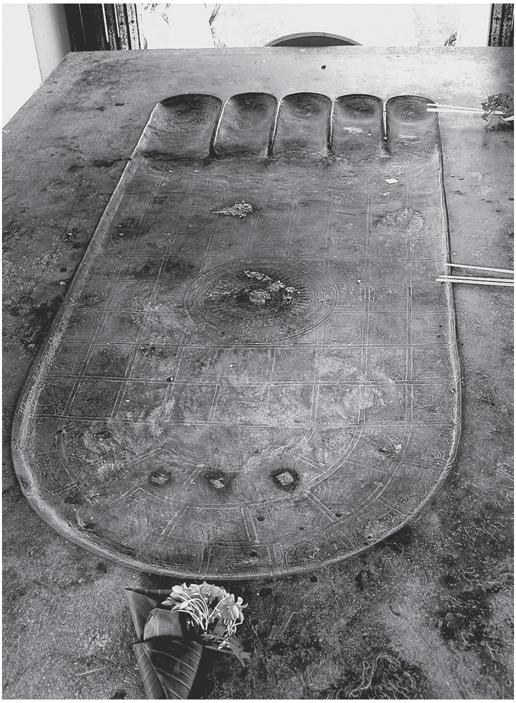


Figure 11.2 Footprint, from Wat Traphangtonglang Sukhothai. From P. Skilling, M.L.P. Chirapravati, P. Pichard, P. Assavavirulhakarn, and S. Pakdeekham, *Past Lives of the Buddha: Wat Si Chum—Art, Architecture and Inscriptions* (Bangkok: River Books, 2008). Courtesy of the River Books Co. Ltd.

of the vestibules of temples (Woodward 2005: 301). At Wat Si Chum, the footprint is located at a corner where the passage forces a person to turn from the south to the west. Perhaps, it symbolically represented walking the path of the Buddha.[21]

In conclusion, the *ānisaṃsa* from "conceptually copying" a revered icon is as important as the "actual copying." In addition, copying revered icons was used as a political tool for legitimating the power of the king and the prosperity of his kingdom. Kevin Trainor's reading of the cult of corporeal relics of the Buddha in the Sinhalese chronicles suggests that the relics should be seen in terms of royal and renunciant paradigms of power (cited in Swearer 2004: 37).

Artistic copying between Sri Lanka and Sukhothai

There are only a handful of publications concerning stylistic analysis of connections among Sri Lanka, Sukhothai, and Martaban. Among these are the pioneering works by A.B. Griswold, Hiram W. Woodward, Jr., and Pamala Gutman. The stylistic analysis of Woodward in *The Sacred Sculpture*

of Thailand traces distinctive facial features and the high-tiered diadems seen on figures at Wat Phra Phai Luang and the engraved slabs at Wat Si Chum to the Lankatilaka Rajamahavihāra in Gampola (Woodward and Strahan 1997: 151). He points out that although no Sinhalese appearance can be traced in the ancient remains of Nakhon Prathom and Lopburi, the two most prominent cities of the late thirteenth to the first half of the fourteenth century, the preclassic Sukhothai style[22] can be traced to Nakhon Si Thammarat in Peninsular Thailand and Martaban in Southern Burma. He concludes, "in general the evidence points toward the Martaban region as a probable source, and in a period prior to the coming of direct influences from Sri Lanka—either shortly before, or some decades before, back in the reign of King Ram Khamhaeng."

Elsewhere, Pamela Gutman traces the transmission of Mon art to Martaban and then from Martaban to Sukhothai (Gutman 2002). Gutman analyzes two examples of stone reliefs from the Kaw-gun caves at Pa-an in lower Burma representing the Descent from *Trayastriṃśa* (Pāli, *Tāvatiṃsa)* that stylistically influenced the physiognomy of the classic Sukhothai walking Buddha. As mentioned earlier, according to the *Jinakālamālī* and the *Mūlāsana*, after they returned from studying at the Udumbaragiri (in Sri Lanka) around the 1320s, a number of Mon monks from lower Burma established a branch in Pan (modern Pa-an), which is located across the river from the Kaw-gun caves (Gutman 2002: 40). She remarks that interaction between the Mon monks of Martaban and the Thai monks of Sukhothai may have led to the transfer of sculptural styles between the two regions after the eleventh century (Gutman 2002: 40). She traces the Buddha's posture of *tribangha*, jewelry, and ornate headdress to Si Thep (in present-day Phetchabun, Thailand) and Khmer art. It is interesting to note that examples of bronze walking Buddha images in the Sukhothai style were in the collection of the Suriyagoda Rajamahavihāra Kiribatkumbara and in a treasure trove at the Yatidala Pahala Vihāra in Sri Lanka. On stylistic and historical bases, von Schroeder attributes their dates to between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Schroeder 1990: 462–3).

In the next section, I will focus on two distinctive elements: human figures and head ornaments and the *kalā-makara* motif. These are related conceptually, iconographically, or stylistically, to Sinhalese objects, especially those of the two main temples in the capital city Gampola, the Lankātilaka and the Gaḍalādeniya Vihāra. This will help establish the artistic connections between Sukhothai and Sri Lanka.

Human figures and head ornaments

The earliest appearance of Sinhalese facial features in Sukhothai art can be traced to the *Jātaka* slabs of Wat Si Chum, which was built by Si Sattha, the author of Inscriptions II and XI mentioned earlier. The temple is dated to around the last quarter of the fourteenth century.[23] It is located outside of the ancient city of Sukhothai near to the forest dwelling temple of Wat Pha Daeng. There are approximately one hundred slabs of the first one hundred *Jātaka*s, drawn from the *Ekanipat*, installed in the tunnel-like passage of this temple. The stylistic

appearance of the human and animal figures as well as the various kinds of floral motifs suggests that the slabs were made by several groups of artisans. The first groups of slabs (*Jātaka* numbers 3–10) show a stronger Sinhalese facial type than the slabs installed deeper in the inner part of the passage.

On the Serivanija *jataka* slab, the facial features of the two figures closely resemble the main Buddha images from the Lankātilaka and the Gaḍalādeniya Vihāra in Gampola (Sri Lanka). King Bhuvanekabāhu IV (1341–1351) built both temples in 1344. While the original image at Lankātilaka was partially restored during the reign of Parākramabāhu (1411–1466) and then totally restored in the eighteenth century, the Gaḍalādeniya Vihāra, on the other hand, was not as well funded and therefore, there were fewer changes to the face of the main Buddha image (Listopad 1995: 474). It is remarkable, however, that these two images still share close stylistic affinities. They have a round facial structure with a hooked nose, a sharply formed mouth, and a round prominent chin. These features are distinctive for Sukhothai, because, the more common appearances in this region by the fourteenth century were either influenced by Khmer or Dvāravati styles, which had earlier occupied this area. While the Khmer images have a broad and square face with prominent eyes, large nose, and thick lips, the Dvāravati have round features with sinuous curves in both the mouth and eyes. The similarity between the Si Chum slab and the two Sinhalese images is notable. The Wat Si Chum slab



Figure 11.3 Serivanija *jātaka* slab from Wat Si Chum (Sukhothai). From P. Skilling, M.L.P. Chirapravati, P. Pichard, P. Assavavirulhakarn, and S. Pakdeekham, *Past Lives of the Buddha: Wat Si Chum—Art, Architecture and Inscriptions* (Bangkok: River Books, 2008). Courtesy of the River Books Co. Ltd.

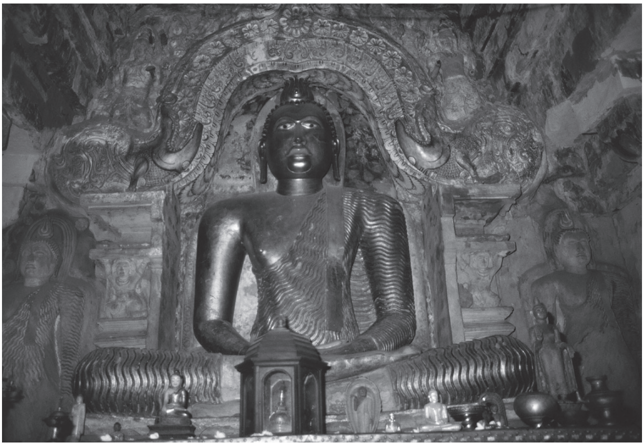


Figure 11.4 Main Buddha image at the Gaḍalādeniya Vihāra in Sri Lanka. Photo courtesy of John A. Listopad.

was likely based on (or copied from) Sinhalese images in Gampola. According to Inscription II, Si Sattha traveled to Gampola and to a forest dwelling temple outside the city to venerate an important relic (National Library, Fine Arts Department 1980: 38–9).

The distinctive Gampola facial features, not found among other ancient sites in central Thailand, can also be traced on stucco Buddha images[24] and deities from a *chedi* at Wat Phra Phai Luang in Sukhothai.[25] If we look closely at the stucco head of Wat Trakaun, it is apparent that its appearance is also clearly associated with the main image of the Gaḍalādeniya Vihāra (see Figure 11.4). Hence, the Gampola style of the middle of the fourteenth century, which was contemporary to early Sukhothai, seems to be the source of inspiration for early Sukhothai images especially the Wat Si Chum and Wat Trakuan group, and it continued to influence Thai sculptures through the sixteenth century (Listopad 1995: 480).

Another direct influence of Sinhalese art in Sukhothai is the depiction of high-tiered diadems, which is seen on the *Jātaka* slabs at Wat Si Chum (see Figure 11.3). This type of diadem appears commonly in paintings as well as on figures of *apsāras* at various sites in Sri Lanka around this period, such as those at the Gaḍalādeniya Vihāra.

Kalā-makara motifs

The most common mythological creatures depicted over the doorways of religious buildings of Sukhothai are the *kalā*, *makara* (a quasi-crocodilian creature), and *nāga* (mythical serpent). Typically, *kalā* and *makara* were commonly combined into a form of a highly ornamented arch, where their tails joined at the apex. When depicted by itself, a *kalā* is placed over the temple portals. By the

fourteenth century, a *kalā* spewing forth two garlands and strings of pearls in the form of arches was used as a common decorative motif on the tops of pediments in Sukhothai. These curving arches terminate in either inward turning forms of *makaras* or *kinnara*s (half-bird-half-man or half-bird-half-woman), while their tails spray upwards and outwards in a swirl of foliated scrolls. An example of this motif can be found on the stucco ornaments on the axial towers of Wat Mahathat in Sukhothai. The appearance of the *kalā-makara* ornaments remarkably resembles Sinhalese motifs, especially those at Lankātilaka and the Gaḍalādeniya Vihāra in Gampola (see Figure 11.4). Griswold even remarks in his book, *Towards a History of Sukhothai Art* that "The ornament of the axial towers is so Sinhalese that we cannot doubt they had a hand in it" (Griswold 1967: 21). In Sinhalese art, the *kalā-makara* motifs were widely used from the fourteenth to as late as the eighteenth century. Because the Lankātilaka and the Gaḍalādeniya Vihāra underwent major restorations so that the stucco ornaments reflect the Kandyan style of the eighteenth century, they cannot be used for comparison in this article. Listopad associates the stylistic appearances of Wat Mahathat's *kalā-makara* to the eighteenth century style of the Kandyan such as those over the caves at the *Mahārājavihāra* at Dambulla. He proposes that the stucco tail of the *makara* arch at Wat Mahathat is "closer stylistically to the more dramatic and more deeply carved stucco reliefs of eighteenth century Sinahalese *makara* arches." He also suggests that at least some portions of the stucco works at Wat Mahathat were refurbished at approximately the same time that King Dhammaracha I (or Lithai) restored Wat Mahathat Chaliang. Listopad concludes that the artisan executing the stucco at Wat Mahathat might have worked from a drawing of a Sinhalese *makara* arch, but the technique and aesthetic is Thai; hence, the work was by Thai, not Sinhalese, craftsmen.

The transmission of the distinctive Gampola *kalā-makara* motif can be traced from small bronze images of the Buddha sitting under a *kalā-makara* motif that were discovered in archaeological sites in the Kandy district, where these two temples are located (Schroeder 1990: figures 141D and 141H). Another similar example can be found on a seated Buddha discovered at an ancient site in Arādhanākanda. The *kalā-makara* motif, the flame-like motifs, and the shape of the *torana* resemble those of the Wat Mahathat stucco. On the basis of style, von Schroeder attributes its date to the Divided Kingdoms period between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Schroeder 1990: 460–1). In my opinion, the craftsmen in Sukhothai could have used a small image as a model. Even though to date there is no archaeological record of Gampola bronze images found in Sukhothai, however, three small Sinhalese bronze Buddha images were deposited in the crypt of Wat Ratchaburana in Ayutthaya, dated to 1424. A mural painting and some types of tablets and metal images in this crypt were clearly inspired by Sinhalese art. Thus, it would not be surprising to speculate that local craftsmen could have used a Sinhalese model for the source of Wat Mahathat's stucco. It is also possible that Sinhalese monks were involved in the construction of Wat Ratchaburana, because two Sinhalese monks were among the group that arrived in Ayutthaya in 1424. It would not be surprising if Sinhalese craftsmen in Sukhothai and its vicinity



Figure 11.5 Axial tower of Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai. After Fournereau 1908.

who were involved in the Wat Si Chum project were to have participated in the construction of Wat Mahathat. Future archeological excavations in Sukhothai will help reveal information regarding this material.

Conclusion

It is evident that manuscripts were not the only objects copied and transmitted across Buddhist manuscript cultures. Buddhist artisans also engaged in copying images and artistic styles. While Sukhothai's epigraphical materials have plentiful references to the transmission of Theravāda Buddhism from Sri Lanka to Sukhothai via Martaban, much less archaeological remains of the early fourteenth century have survived. Unfortunately, archaeological sites in both Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai were not properly excavated and restorations were improperly done, thus, very little can be traced at present. However, in spite of these problems, the

Gampola style of facial features and headdress clearly inspired temples in the early period of Sukhothai. Interestingly, the influence is most strongly apparent in the temples that had associations with forest-dwelling monks and the Sinhalese lineages in Martaban. Future excavations in Martaban may help address some of the missing stylistic links among these three regions.

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Notes

1 The other sect is the *Ariyarahanta*. The Kalyāṇī Inscription was erected by King Dhammacedi at Pegu in 1476. See Blagden 1928: vol. 3, pt. 2, 196.
2 For further information on Sumana see Nagara and Griswold (1992: 321–2), and for *Mūlasāsana* see Nagara and Griswold (1992: 323).
3 I am grateful to Hiram Woodward for his valuable advice on this topic.
4 For *Medhankara* see Nagara and Griswold (1992: 92–99).
5 Three late Polonaruva bronze Buddha images, dating to around the twelfth–thirteenth century, were deposited in the crypt of Wat Ratchaburana. In addition, one of the mural paintings showing rows of seated Buddhas under a round-shaped tree closely resembles the Sinhalese style of the fourteenth century. See Chirapravati (2005: 81–94).
6 For further information, see Krabuansaeng (1989: 132–133) and Damdenngam (1995: 21–38).
7 In my opinion, this is very important, because it indicates that Sinhalese monks used *talapat* for chanting. This is also supported by several Buddha images, votive tablets, and Wat Si Chum's slabs. See Chirapravati (2008: 28–32).
8 At least six images with their legends are called Sihing Buddhas. Five images, Phra Sihing (at Hor Phrabhut Sihing), Nakhon Si Thammarat; Phra Sing (at Wat Phra Sing), Chiang Mai; Phra Sihing (at Wat Phra Chao Mengrai), Chiang Mai (dated 1470); Phra Sihing (at Wat Khok Kham), Samut Sakhon (dated 1689); and Phra Sihing at Trang (stolen), are depicted in the Enlightenment scene with the hands in *bhūmisparśamudra* and legs crossed in *vajrasana*. These reflect Pāla style and iconography. Phra Sihing at the Bhuttaisawan chapel (National Museum Bangkok) is the only image that is stylistically and iconographically related to Sinhalese Buddha images. The Buddha is seated with the hands folded in meditation and the facial features are related to the Gampola style of the fourteenth century. Luang Boribal Buribhand and A.B. Griswold remark that, "…Of the three claimants to the title, the one at present in Bangkok is probably the closest to the type referred to in the legend." See Buribhand and Griswold 1954: vol. 2, 250.
9 For further information on Sukhothai inscriptions see *Charuk samai sukhothai* (1983), Bangkok: Fine Arts Department.
10 For further information regarding this material see Brown (1988).
11 For studies of the Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya see Huntington and Huntington (1990: 85), Leoshko, ed. (1988).
12 Hiram Woodward argues that they were all made at Bodh Gaya while Susan L. Huntington attributes them to Burma. See Woodward (1981: 22–23), and Huntington and Huntington (1990: 217–220).

13 For further information on the Pāla international style, see Huntington and Huntington (1990).
14 According to Barua, after the Muslims' destruction of the Mahabodhi temple, three hundred Sinhalese monks had the privilege of being the official priests of the Mahabodhi temple in the thirteenth century (Barua 1981: 69).
15 She further explains that Buddha seated in meditation was produced specifically for tree-shrines, and it has been hailed as a Sri Lankan invention (Dehejia 1988: 95).
16 For further information see Geiger (1912). A short summary of Sri Lankan art history can be found in Listopad (2003).
17 The Satmahal Pāsāda was built on the orders of Nissankamalla (1187–1196). For further information see Schroeder (1990: 408–409).
18 Personal communication.
19 The temple was restored by Burmese monks in 1035 and 1086. The Muslim invasion into northeastern India by the end of the twelfth century caused the destruction of many Buddhist and Hindu monuments, which led to the abandonment of the Mahābodhi temple by around the end of the thirteenth century. In the nineteenth century, it was again restored by the British.
20 Prasert and Griswold translated the inscription as follows, "…(For) that foot print, Brana Dharmikaraja sent to Sinhala to make impressions of the trace of…our lord's foot which is stamped on top of Mount Sumanakūṭaparvata, to measure its size, and to bring (the impressions) back to be copied for everyone [to worship]…. (Nagara and Griswold 1992: 465).
21 One was taken to Bangkok and is on display in the Sukhothai Gallery of the National Museum, Bangkok.
22 The term "Classic Sukhothai" or "High Classical style" has been used by several scholars in the past to describe images that were made around the fourteenth century. The Buddha images have distinct features: oval-shaped face, elongated nose, thin lips with a slight smile, small curls, and a prominent flame-like finial. The images are depicted in a super-naturalistic manner that generally follows the "characteristics of the great man." See Griswold (1960: 90–96).
23 I attribute the date on the basis of stylistic analysis and the inscription. See Chirapravati (2008: 37–38).
24 Approximately ten stucco fragments of stucco heads and torsos were recovered inside the chest of a large ruined stucco image in the central Bayon-style tower at this temple. See Woodward and Strahan (1997: 150).
25 Woodward points out that even though the source of the styles represented by the Wat Phra Phai Luang stuccos cannot be traced to either Nakhon Si Thammarat or Martaban, the V-shaped mouth can be traced to the sculpture of Pagan (Woodward and Strahan 1997: 150).

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